

ELITE EDUCATION  
//  
AND THE PRIVATE SCHOOL

*Excellence and Arrogance at Phillips Exeter Academy*

Alan H. Levy  
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Don't get close to your students

Don't try to be their friend.

– A senior faculty member to a new colleague.

Hello, I'm your daughter's faculty advisor.

She's going to hate me.

– One parent's first encounter with Exeter.

We have a party line here.

– An Academy Dean to a first-year teacher.





## PROLOGUE

Phillips Exeter Academy is as famous as any preparatory school in the country. Its prestige has always been extraordinary. If one asked professional educators to name the ten best secondary schools in the country, Exeter would be on every list. Exeter has consistently drawn superb students, the majority of whom go through the Academy (grades nine through twelve) and achieve academic success, though many have a rough time. Beyond purely academic matters, most students mature with only the normal adolescent bumps.

The quality and reputation of Exeter goes back a long way. This has maintained a momentum of quality applicants. In its early days, from its founding in 1781 to the Civil War, it produced a legion of national figures, the most famous being Daniel Webster, John P. Hale, Edward Everett, and Lewis Cass. In this century politicians, diplomats, physicians, lawyers and leading businessmen abound its alumni roles. Several prominent contemporary writers—Gore Vidal, Peter Benchley, John Knowles, John Irving—are Exeter alumni. With such a history and image, superb students continually flock to Exeter. It does not terribly overstate matters to say that Exeter is *the* prep school of the United States, George Bush's attending Andover notwithstanding.

Any institution can get spoiled by the luxuries which history and chance have granted it. Danger looms when the institution follows the outer pattern of ways whose content had earlier contributed to greatness. It can smugly bureaucratize its pedagogical spirit, take precious things for granted, become a caricature of itself, risk stasis and decline.





# Chapter I

## The Sainted Seminars

Exeter prides itself on being an open institution. Outwardly it succeeds. Newcomers to the faculty are officially encouraged to be forthright and involved in school issues. Despite this posture, a distinctly vertical culture pervades in regard to most every formal and informal genre of Academy activity. In classroom work newcomers are watched carefully by superiors. These mentor relationships can prove profitable. When egos clash they can become destructive. Such supervision exists in virtually every school, but it is peculiar at Exeter. For Exeter insiders hold as their primary article of faith that they have a most unique approach to education that must be imbibed by every newcomer.

The heart of Exeter's sense of educational uniqueness is its "Harkness" system. In the late 1920's industrialist/philanthropist Edward Harkness, the man whose charity underwrote Harvard's "Houses" and Yale's "College System," financed changes which altered the outward style of teaching at Exeter. No longer would classes be conducted with teachers lecturing before rows of students. Now students and teachers would all sit around a table, "everyone in the front row," as it were, discussing topics Socratically. This continues today. Classroom method involves free discussion and exchange. The goal is to promote free thinking rather than didactically to present a litany of facts. The tables themselves are rather impressive pieces of carpentry and have alembicated sliding mini-tables on which students take tests. The number of these mini-tables (12) allegedly

limits the number of students in a class because any variant of the Socratic method cannot work when the class size is too great. Mr. Harkness pinpointed the best class size at "about eight." Over the years at Exeter inflation has pressed the number upward. Now fifteen is normal.

Exeter lionizes its "Harkness system." The Academy bookstore even sells a poster of the table's architectural design (the students prefer those of rock musicians). The faculty speak endlessly of "the Harkness method." Like an impressionist painting this "method" is best comprehended from a particular distance. If too far away, one sees little but vague outline; too close, more importantly, and the totality of the work is lost and minutiae stand out unduly. The Exeter faculty stands too close to the pedagogy it idealizes and amidst the many details loses sight of true needs and elevates irrelevancies. When one veteran English teacher left Exeter, he insisted his new school purchase him a "Harkness table" for his classroom. His attitude toward his new colleagues was utterly high-handed. In his view no one but he and his former associates knew how to teach.

Some Exeter classes are extremely enlivening; others are terribly boring. The method of teaching is but one, often minor component in this dynamic. Pedagogical method is a valid matter for any educator to consider, up to a point. Beyond that, the time spent in study of method yields diminishing returns and can be better spent on the content of subject matter. All over the country education schools err along these very lines. Critics like Allan Bloom and Mortimer Adler have advocated outright abolition of schools of education. While Exeter requires no education certificates of its faculty and rightfully pooh poohs the intellectually barren nature of such study, it does so for a different reason. The Exeter faculty is convinced they are, in effect, their own education school. New teachers are told: whatever teaching experiences you have had make no difference here; here you will learn to teach our way.

As at any school, when veteran teachers observe new faculty member's classes much useful, constructive criticism comes forth. But at Exeter often more powerful and incessant are particular platitudes – "the best class is one where the teacher says nothing." "The more you get them to talk to each other, the better the class." As with any truism, an element of



legitimacy exists in such chants. But such rhetorical generalities hold little depth and provide no basis for exchange. Newcomers dare not question. Young faculty observe senior colleagues' classes and get hints and little tips. But like learning to write from reading others, a point is quickly reached beyond which lies destructive patterning. The most effective teachers blaze their own paths. Viewing various classes reveals the obvious—that different teachers accomplish their ends in different ways, the most successful often being those who have the least self-consciousness about method and the greatest devotion to content. This is nothing startling to anyone who teaches. But at Exeter one dares not state such obvious points. It offends many who have taught there a long time, who are not terribly strong in the classroom, and whose professional and personal definition, above all, is bound up in the Harkness mystique.

The age and veneration of the institution nurture those who hold a fierce loyalty to Phillips Exeter, sometimes called "Uncle Phil"(!). One unfortunate consequence is a surrealism in regard to judgments of effectiveness of performance. Teachers whom students regard as boring, uninspiring and ineffective can stand well with Academy officialdom, while some terrific teachers stand lower. Of course many good and bad instructors earn their true place. But the almost random relationship between officially deemed and actual quality is alarming. It provides a mask to a school which holds its inner culture as an end in itself and ignores and ultimately diminishes the goals that culture originally served.

A young teacher risks much stating the fact of the "Harkness method" being rather amorphous, a concept borne out in practice with not nearly the systematic inner content official Academy literature and discourse indicates. The brand of sacrilege comes forth in such forms as: "not dedicated to the kind of teaching the institution desires." In pedagogical judgment the normative has come to eclipse the cognitive. Indeed the intangibility of the Harkness system permits such discombobulation. Alternatively, with more political shrewdness, a new teacher can approach a senior colleague and insincerely confess, as one did: "I'm just terrified of this Harkness system. I just can't seem to grasp it. How do you do it?" Then the response was positive, if a bit condescending and vacuous: "Oh, I have the same problems

even today. You just have to dedicate yourself to the tasks ahead every morning." Perhaps back in the days of the Puritans such self-effacement was spiritually uplifting in a small New England town. Today it is merely charming. The trouble is that such a mentality promotes what David Riesman termed an "other-directed," church-order solidity among insiders, and political wariness and cynicism rather than educational commitment among new faculty.

The Harkness standard is unattainable because it cannot exist systematically in reality, only amorphously in the minds of true believers. The conformity promoted among faculty continuously feeds upon itself. Given the free thinking and self-discovery a Socratic system is designed to promote among students, it is striking how Exeter funnels its teachers in the very opposite way. Socrates felt it wise to induce tension into the educational process, for only then could students transcend assumptions and set patterns of thought and reach more genuinely objective and creative modes. Exeter strives for this to a point with its students but leans in the very opposite way with its faculty. Only a high degree of narcissism can permit such a cavern between the goals of teaching and of teaching teaching. It is a shame that Edward Harkness did not simply give money to ensure small class size. That and the excellent quality of students are what make the system work; pedagogical method is minimally important in comparison. The furniture accompanying Harkness' gift has aged and devolved into an altar whose worship blunts the effectiveness of the Socratic methods his philanthropy intended to promote.

Any idea if unintelligently, no matter how lovingly, tended can become a caricature of itself. Now over a half century old, the Harkness system has grown so obtuse that it operates more with a hegemony which obfuscates its original intentions than with a leadership which promotes them. It is as unyielding as the old lecture system it displaced, perhaps more so because of its self-consciousness. Because the Harkness system first marked a significant departure from past ways, it generated an image of the school being innovative, an image to which Exeter still clings. The actual long-term impact has been just the opposite. The structure of instruction is now quite rigid. Innovation is impossible. Uses of most any classroom



technology are discouraged. Trips are minimal; teachers should not take classes outside on nice days. One art teacher whose class topic lent itself to the use of visual equipment prompted some raised eyebrows simply because he often turned out the lights and had students study slides. More generally, whenever general changes are suggested at meetings, teachers intone "Harkness" as a basis of opposition and almost always succeed.

In addition to promoting pedagogical conservatism, Harkness nurtures a *sui generis* aura among established faculty. There is little acknowledgement that the operation of the system varies tremendously, though obviously it must with variations of subject matter, class composition, and personalities and outlooks of teachers and students. There also lies an odd refusal to believe that other schools and colleges all over the world put chairs in a circle or sit around tables and hold discussions. And woe be unto any teacher who points out he or she has previously taught discussion classes (although virtually every graduate student has). The reality of Exeter's self-overrated uniqueness is not to intrude upon the surreality of its sense of uniqueness.

Harkness or no, variations abound between teachers and departments. In the sciences, for example, much is taught through lecture. A Harkness approach promotes learning through laboratory work outweighing the lecture. Exeter's science department uses labs a great deal, but it employs them with a balance in keeping with the dictates of the subject matter not out of piety toward a pedagogical abstraction. However, many of Exeter's non-biological science classes are weak. Many bright students are turned off by some ineffective teachers and unjustifiably low grading. Scientific fields, so critically underpopulated in this day, lose promising entrants. The less scientifically fluent who might blossom with proper nurturing also suffer, for the department refuses to section students on the basis of ability. Given its general quality of student, Exeter should secure many student science prizes in various national and local contests. For years the Academy has come up short here while doing well in other fields. Indeed in comparison with computers, literature, poetry, drama, music, or many other fields, little physical or natural science can be found in the extracurricular life of the students in such endeavors as field work or

ecological activity in the community. This unfavorably contrasts with other schools. Exeter students seem to want little to do with science. The science department suffers as much as any from Exeter's collective egotism which permits arrogant, often unattainable standards and indulges poor classroom leadership. This incurs the general contempt of students and leaves the school in a perpetual state of embarrassment before many universities to which students apply.

In mathematics where, unlike chemistry, Harkness' learning by doing does not potentially endanger lives, the department emphasizes problem solving by the students. A great percentage of class time is spent with everyone at the boards. Naturally the rightness or wrongness of an answer legitimizes the interceding of authority, thereby avoiding many pointless relativisms that can arise when the concept of Socratic teaching loses context. Math discussions often focus on the different approaches to solving a given problem. Here again the subject matter provides clear judgment as to the efficacy of one approach versus another on which all can usually agree.

In the study of foreign languages, the seminar tables promote exchange and the natural practice of conversation and grammar. The small size of the classes and the quality of the students are far more important dynamics than the presence or shape of the table. As with mathematics, the correctness of a particular matter keeps discussion within bounds, beyond which would lie silliness. "Harkness" has no real meaning here; these are just small classes with excellent students that work very well.

Exeter's seminar format is outwardly ideal for the teaching of literature. The approach here is obvious and simple: students read an assignment and come into class and discuss it with one another. In classes all viewpoints are valid, and all must be respected, at least in theory. The teacher says little, at times nothing, though some of the worst teachers in the English department follow this formula while some of the strongest are quite active. The ideal is that optimum learning occurs when students teach themselves. With a theory of equality of viewpoints, this method of teaching literature involves heavy reliance on the text itself. At no time are students assigned essays of literary criticism, for then one view could dominate.



Consequently the English department uses its school library as rarely as any prep school English department in the country.

Not coincidentally, mainstays in the English department consider themselves practitioners of the "New Criticism," a movement begun in the late forties and fifties led by Robert Penn Warren, John Crowe Ransom, Cleanth Brooks, Allen Tate and others. New Criticism responded to the excessive analyses of literature solely as part of biography or cultural history (i.e., life and times of the author) and sought to study the words of the text regardless of the writer's or story's context. At times this reaches such excess that paragraphs and sentences get taken out of textual context, often for a teacher's personal or political purposes. Young faculty come into the department, often with graduate training, and feel they have entered a time warp. The old debate of the text transcending any contextual discussion, be it historic or linguistic, continues to rage as far as Exeter's English department is concerned, and they earnestly fight the old battle. Little room for actual debate of these issues exists within the department where a party line is well entrenched and made abundantly clear to newcomers. Anything since the New Criticism—(neo-Romanticism, Structuralism, Marxianism, Deconstruction)—has not made a dent.

At its inception, as a corrective to the "text-less" historical, biographical, and Freudian lit. crit. which dominated the field in the first half of this century, the new Criticism had compensatory value. Now that the context which enlivened the move against focus on context is gone, the value declines. Standing alone, the now dated corrective risks anti-intellectualism. What was originally a catalyst now needs a catalyst. The New Criticism approach and its defense has grown mechanical and dry. (And, for example, it is certainly no way to teach the Romantic poets.) Further, the New Criticism worked well in high school situations where library resources were often thin. All one needed was a teacher, students, and a text. With probably the best secondary school library in the country, one that would do many colleges proud, Exeter is the last school in the world for a New Criticism approach to literature to remain necessary. Yet there it thrives.

While something precious lies in such continuing antiquated pedagogical ideals, funnier surrealisms surround students' responses to their

old New Criticism teachers. They regularly scurry off to the library and read published criticism, "New" and recent, to arm themselves for class discussions. Teachers subsequently glorify their brand of instruction on the basis of the brilliant insight students garner from "reading only the text." One student wrote a paper on *Hamlet*, having scoured the thoughts of A. C. Bradley and other scholars. Her teacher praised her insights and held up her work as an example of how imaginative and incisive students can be on their own. The teacher should have at least been aware of the standard criticism, if only to be able to reject it intelligently. Unencumbered by any departmental ideology, students naturally seek other views on the materials they are reading. The narrowness of their teachers compels them to avoid the usual referring to published criticism a normal literature teacher expects in analytical writing. The ignorance of their teachers holds forth few risks of plagiarism. The blind, New Criticism stance then simultaneously compels and overlooks dishonesty. Subsequent praise from teachers leaves as much a heritage of cynicism in regard to authority as an appreciation of great writing.

Life-and-times historical approaches to literature do miss the essence of the works themselves, as often do recent structuralist and deconstructionist analytical modes, though from the latter's standpoint such a judgment would depend on what was meant by "essence." While they risk suffusing students, purely textural approaches risk unduly nailing them to the floor. Students can more readily remove the nails than crash land from the suffusion, so any error of emphasis is better left on the text. A little balance would risk nothing and be of great value to students. But the Old Believers in the New Criticism can broach no compromise. Thus a Shakespeare play to which fifteen class meetings might be devoted would be well treated with two or three sessions covering readings on context—historical and critical—and the rest on the text. Exeter's English department demands all time spent on the text. They compel agreement from all newcomers and kid themselves as to how *à la page* they are as critics. Meanwhile the students laughingly whiz by.

In "lesser" and newer departments like art, music, religion, and drama the class method is left to the individual departments. The Academy community seems to pressure these departments less to conform to any



pedagogical ideals. At the least, faculty regard them out of the mainstream, and some refuse to take such departments seriously, preferring they be abolished. This excessive narrowness is, of course, an old story and not unique, though somewhat virulent at Exeter. This beyond-the-pale position, however, permits these departments to pursue roads of educational excellence without having to steer over and around the pedagogically pointless political and psychic obstacles of Harkness. The faculty that teach gym enjoy the same pleasures and detriments of neglect, if anyone cares.

In history the operation of Harkness is a thorny matter. Some superb classes can be found in that department, but a visit to several acknowledged great teachers' classes reveals a tremendous variety of method. A chief problem with teaching history is that one can make a case at any level below post-survey college courses that the discipline contains bodies of narrative which must be mastered before any fertile analytical discussion or research can take place. An equally defensible alternative holds that analysis and imaginative research can be nurtured throughout study with the textural narrative as constant handmaiden. The former purports to be more scientific, the latter more literary. Everyone strikes a balance, but the nature of that balance varies from instructor to instructor. Resolution is impossible, and there is little pedagogical point in striving for one. Teachers must discover the mode of operation most animating to themselves, to their students, and to the particular subject matter at hand. The same holds for classroom style.

The existence of such variations and subtitles would cause no alarm at Exeter but for the specter of "Harkness" that compels at least outward piety to the notion that there is one best approach. This one-way outlook has bred a collectivist mentality in the history department within which countless hours are wasted striving to achieve consensus on approaches to subject matter and method which vary the moment each teacher returns to his or her classroom. In regard to seminar method teachers talk at length about how they strive to stimulate discussion and minimize their own presence. Yet one visits their class or walks by their classroom and they are virtually lecturing. Often they are very effective, and those who come closest to the outer ideal forms of Harkness teaching are actually some of the most boring in the

department, not because of their method of teaching but because of more salient matters of personality and knowledge.

To some history teachers good teaching involves promoting discussion in virtually any form. Often contemporary events get discussed as parallels to the assigned lessons. This can be useful, but in some classes such tangents occupy a majority of class time. A class on John Brown's raids, for example, veers off and languishes on the general question of the utility of modern terrorism. A bit of such comparisons can be of value. But an incessant approach along these lines encourages students to shoot from the hip, prepare haphazardly and risk puerility. It compromises the content of the reading assignment and demoralizes some students. Subsequently, many of the students discussing John Brown's raid along such purely presentist lines can often not explain to any depth the terribly important political and economic antecedents to John Brown's activities—slavery in the territories, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Missouri Compromise. And one has to be able to narrate before one can analyze or speculate effectively. Otherwise discussions easily grow hollow. Very much for this narrow approach to pedagogy in history, Exeter students score lower on the American History Scholastic Achievement Test than on any other such national tests they take. New-Criticism style classes may have some value with literature, but such discussion of discrete topics independent of context does not work with history. Many pupils also cynically manipulate such classes. A standard drone of students holds that one need not come terribly prepared to most history classes, just deflect the discussion onto a particular issue, and ride it. "Why prepare?" bemoaned one. "We always get off the topic anyway." With such silly adages as "the students must talk all matters out themselves," the ideal of Harkness teaching turns into a shell of itself, and some teachers find themselves ideologically impeded from intervening in classroom dynamics in the name of content. Blind to virtually all but Harkness ideals, a few instructors hold such b.s. sessions, at which students privately snicker, to be good classes. After all, the students are teaching themselves. The students know better.

The quality of a class is a more subtle and elusive matter than the fuzzy concept of any pedagogical method can encompass. Any assertion that



the seminar system is not so well defined brings forth normative, *ad hominem* rejections and a questioning of the critic's dedication. The "walling out" does not stop there. Revealing are the depressive discussions among some faculty about teaching which essentially look for collegial support to cover the holes the incomplete concept of "Harkness" cannot. "Look, if I'm going to teach here for another \_\_\_ years," exclaimed one, "I've got to believe this Harkness system stands for something." From colleagues came support longer on emotional than intellectual content. An older, more secure colleague subsequently approached a younger associate and asked if he perceived what had taken place in that exchange. Both understood that the seminar system did not merely transcend pedagogical concerns into the political arena, but into the psychological as well.

It is in such an extra-pedagogical spirit that teachers gravitate to identical reading assignments. When one or two make a decision in regard to a text, invariably most fall into line. Of course everyone uses the same text in varied fashions. Different subjects get emphasized. Class dynamics affect treatment of even the same subject. Even with different texts, survey courses in, for example, American History, almost always cover similar themes. That is nothing startling to any history teacher, and the result is no substantive need for standard readings. Further, variations allow the teacher to emphasize what enlivens him or her. The enthusiasm that rubs off on students is pivotal. For any collective imperative to cut against that runs great risks. Even though everyone works in the same historical ball park at Exeter, oodles of time are spent in pursuit of a consensus on readings. Discussions of various materials' strengths and weaknesses are of value. Beyond the point of shared information, however, the preoccupation with consensus is waste. The need for surface harmony is more communitarian than pedagogical and can be destructive to the latter.

Beyond readings some want collectively to standardize syllabi so, for example, everyone's American History survey would get to the Revolution or to the Civil War at the same time. The purpose is never clear. Several years ago one teacher spent too many weeks on only Puritanism and was clearly unbalanced in approach. Consequently some have been needlessly trifling about variations, for with that one exception variations are minor. Oddly,

though, some elders in the department have advocated outright omission of the entire Colonial era. This many do not feel to be out of line (at a New England Academy?). An earnest, persnickety tone seems the deepest root of the desires for common rhythm of syllabi. Variations threaten, and perverse exclusion of key topics are accepted if they originate with insiders. No rules overtly compel commonality, but a need to maintain outward collegiality and not threaten fragile egos leads to a compelling other-directedness in the department's operation which has little to do with subject matter, with students, or with the classroom. The resulting situation ignores new ideas, indulges silly ones, and risks holding everyone down to the lowest common denominator of imagination and ability.

The operation of the alleged standards of Harkness teaching at Exeter bring to mind members of a church who do not follow the rules terribly well, grow increasingly neurotic about their apparent hypocrisy, and vent their guilt on their children. If only the rules would be taken as less severe guides, the ideals could then be more readily upheld. But severe Harkness ideals cloud everything and consequently violate much of their original spirit. The fact is the best class is rarely one where the teacher says nothing. Even where student discussion carries the hour, intelligent and judicious prodding by the teacher is almost always helpful.

With a canonized system, Exeter tends to evaluate its teachers deductively. Harkness engenders a sense, ever more rigidly held because of its internal vagueness, of a Way to teach. One is then observed, and the sense of the observation subtracted from the Way yields the remainder of what needs to be done for improvement. A more subtle, inductive approach to teaching better seeks to nurture improvements out of instructors' existing patterns, not against an abstract standard. Any teacher of some basic quality is best evaluated inductively. An utterly wretched teacher cannot be helped. Deductive analyses can sustain mediocrity, however, and the Academy increasingly risks this with the leitmotif of Harkness interceding everywhere.

Unfortunate consequences stem from the excessively rigid state of Exeter's seminar system. "Harkness" runs throughout the rhetoric and culture of the Institution, often clouding pedagogical concerns. The Academy has employed a rather queer daily class schedule with classes



running morning through late afternoon, with athletics interspersed throughout the day. Class which fall right after athletics are often ill focused, with some wet-haired students trying to gear out of gym. To the question of why not run a normal schedule with athletics after classes, the answer is that the Harkness classes, unlike those of other schools, require such concentration of students that fatigue would ensue if they were lined up one after the other. This comes down to a "six-of-one..." matter, for concentration wanes for some no matter what the schedule. But the sense of exceptionalism in the rationale is key. Accentuating this is a desire to maximize the gym faculty's feeling of involvement in the curriculum. They are very sensitive about their status, and community concerns invariably eclipse educational ones, no matter the needs of students, and the dictates of common sense are compromised.

Exeter also has no final examinations, nor many climactic student demonstrations of mastery of analytical skills or knowledge. The seminar classes simply go right to the end of each semester. Hour tests do not even take place the last day, for grades are due from teachers that morning. The official line of the Academy is that the Harkness format of learning must not be violated. Of course little learning occurs the last day of each semester. Many classes have parties. Beyond the egocentric self-deception among Academy insiders here, students get no practice at finals, something they might best go through once or twice before college. The Academy could easily institute final examinations or, better, demonstrations of the thinking of the discipline at hand. But that would make the school appear normal, a prospect which flies in the face of the institution's collective ego. Oral or written demonstrations, more in line with modern educational reforms would be resisted because the Exeter faculty feel they already embody those ideals. Indeed they may have at one point but have since slipped away and no longer take cues from the outside. The failure here to respond to the undeniable fact that students work when they will be held accountable not only reveals a clinging to a silly image but results in less learning. The broader reality is that the Academy's excellence gets dimmed by the dictates of the ego which that historical excellence has permitted.

Accentuating complacency, many departments at Exeter prefer not to take Ph.D.'s to fill new positions and display little concern with trends in their academic specialities. In history some faculty, politically respected in the Academy and regarded as solid Harkness teachers, are quite deficient in general historical and bibliographic knowledge. They discuss avenues of interpretation, hence possible choices of class discussion topics, with hollowness. One veteran in the history department, for example, desired all teachers of U.S. History to cover the segregation-legitimizing case of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* (1896) in their treatment of Reconstruction. Beyond illustrating an excessive desire for syllabic commonality, such an inclusion marks a rather dated approach to Reconstruction which extends the mythology of *de jure* Southern racial segregation rising out of Reconstruction and ignores even such a seminal chestnut as C. Van Woodward's *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* and all scholarships in its wake. In general, Exeter history assignments usually cover the standard issues. Members of the department regard as too trendy approaches and readings professional historians view well on the main travelled road. Acceptable student research sometimes allows for little imagination and takes few recent scholarly trends into account. Grading can be pedestrian and dogmatic. Indeed contrasted with the open exchange, outwardly promoted in classes, many faculty are professionally and intellectually quite closed with respect to one another and to themselves. This extends the hierarchical imperative of the faculty that runs so counter to the functional sense the seminar system seeks to instill in students.

The English Department is also open in its reluctance to hire Ph.D.'s. The Chairman openly declared that in a newspaper interview. The very opposite was the case when the Harkness system was first instituted, when English teachers were more *à la page* in regard to literary criticism. This is a key component of the school becoming a caricature of itself. It increasingly steers clear of avenues formerly toured, now too threatening.

The seminar system thus promotes political shrewdness among young faculty and gamesmanship as much as educational commitment among students. Many students learn how to appear prepared and fluent as much as they actually learn. One student treated his assignments as a game. Every day he tried to beat his previous record of fewest minutes, eventually



seconds, spent in preparation which could still allow him to contribute to the class and fool the teacher. Another student groaned: "you can read one or two chapters of an assignment and talk when the teacher comes to them. I did it all the time." This all promotes a cynicism which thrives to a most unhealthy degree among Exeter students. It can be countered by a teacher who exhibits a contrasting outlook in such a manner the cynic must respect. This requires not mere ministerial exhortation or Pollyanna optimism but strong command of material, so cynicism is not honored by being directly challenged, but circumvented along the paths of knowledge. Nothing destroys a cynic more than the ambivalence of someone respected and knowledgeable. The mastery of material Exeter's teachers need to combat the virulent cynicism of students dictates the Academy seek and promote teachers with advanced training. But such people, if hired, can prove disquietingly independent and neither awestruck nor terribly grateful. Those who then feel threatened have the power to compel the school to lean to the company man, less educated, most grateful to be hired, awed by the Academy, and obliging to political dictates. Students often see through such school-people's limits and their inflated facade, and are usually bright enough to get away with mere game playing in their classes.

The Socratic method was originally envisioned to operate among equals. (And Plato insisted all involved in such levels of education had to be over the age of thirty.) At Exeter or any secondary school students and teachers are not equal. At Exeter the students are obviously younger, and often smarter, while the teachers usually know the material better. Amidst these barriers teachers have to develop their own solutions to make an imperfect structure operate. "Harkness" provides a vague outline. Unfortunately that outline is now filled with political and psychic detail that has to be cut through while considering genuine pedagogical questions, and at the core lies a party line. For those who wed themselves to the politics and psychology of the tables, the system fosters a *sui generis* stance which, given Exeter's reputation, permits a pomposity that often masks timidity. To this pomp students react with discomfort and consternation. One Exeter graduate who went on to Harvard commented that while pomposity in a Harvard professor is obnoxious, "he usually has some real stuff to back it up,

but at Exeter...?" Mortimer Adler once commented from afar that the kind of teaching Exeter allegedly practices is the very best. He would be somewhat disappointed with what actually goes on.

IBM can seek to promote from within its ranks and avoid outsiders who might prove disruptive. But they have a profit line ultimately to test their ways. For a major university there are the reviews and reputations of professors' works among colleagues at large in their fields. An academy has few such interceding litmus tests, and feeling above all others, Exeter is rarely influenced even by other prep schools. Following a corporate model which so emphasizes internal loyalty, Exeter establishes a destructive bottom line which places premium on internal tranquility. The heat of a good, open educational atmosphere is cooled. Mediocrity grows on the faculty. Student cynicism abounds. The school risks incipient decline.

The humanist, wrote Erwin Panofsky, rejects authority but respects tradition. The momentum of an unquestioned pedagogical dogma at Exeter has muddied the distinction between authority and tradition. For now the institution authoritatively demands outward respect for hazily articulated, poorly followed traditions. In doing so it damages those very traditions it holds dear.



## Chapter II

### An Imploding Community

Not only do excessively simple deductions and incongruous standards cloud judgments of pedagogical effectiveness, campus and community concerns crowd the picture too. Established faculty and staff love to regard Exeter as a family. In this vein a touching level of support is given to those who undergo family deaths and illnesses. One of the best features of Academy leadership involves its ability temporarily to restructure the school's operation in the event of some individual crisis. Indeed it marks one of the few times Academy leadership seems able to animate itself, and some oldsters think the leadership goes too far even in that regard. The Academy community has greater difficulty, however, with divorces in their midst. The community clings to older times socially, just as it does academically. Traumas of old render true compassionate understanding. Troubles of recent social vintage lie beyond the pale. The presence of such matters intrudes upon fiercely held community norms which apotheosize outward harmony.

Within its old-fashioned social world a certain level of conformity is expected. How one fits into the Academy community, with faculty spouses, with colleagues at dining tables, and with folks at social gatherings are all terribly significant and intrude into areas beyond the merely social.

When one older faculty member received an award for his years of service, the praise read for him focused almost exclusively on his contribution to faculty meetings, to committees, and to the community. The Principal

read virtually nothing about teaching. It required no mention, for his loyalty was unquestionable. Instructors can receive more official feedback about their dinner conversations and general manner with staff than on their teaching. One teacher entertained her boyfriend for a weekend in her dormitory apartment and was scolded for her indiscretion. Another, away for the summer, stopped by the campus one night and stayed with the couple who had temporary use of his dormitory residence. Several days later an administrator called him, inquiring as to what he was doing back on campus. A dean told another young instructor about the need literally to "hold to the party line." Such events and exchanges occur repeatedly. It marks the continued paternalism of a nineteenth-century town, now ever more at variance, for better or worse, with the behavioral norms and sensibilities of the late twentieth century. Exeter's ideal school man was a faculty member who taught, coached, and lived in a dormitory to work with the students all under a moral code which did not markedly contrast with the general norms and values of early and mid-twentieth-century society. But the changing culture of the past two decades has yielded an ever-widening gap between Academy strictures and irrepressible expectations of young faculty. It is a problem that will not disappear. It can only be squelched. The problem itself leads to great expenditures of psychic energy among faculty and contributes to their burnout.

At Andover, Exeter's equal in every fundamental respect, extraneous social matters in regard to teachers' lifestyles impinge far less upon young faculty. Andover is a slightly larger institution, rendering a pervading school culture less intruding. Most importantly here, Andover was a small New England town that has become a Boston suburb. Exeter has remained a small New England town, and the Academy a discrete community within it. While the rest of the middle-class world has changed, Exeter has remained less affected than it might. Andover has a significant number of part-time faculty who come and go from Boston and lend to the school a sense that life goes on elsewhere. Exeter has few such faculty. What few exist are kept completely on the periphery of Academy matters. Some in the administration hope soon to do away with part-time faculty altogether. Yearly Andover also hires a dozen or so one-year teachers, generally directly



out of college who refresh the school with new ideas and generally good rapport with students. Exeter has but two or three such teaching fellows per year. To the degree an educational institution ought adapt to or come to terms with a changing world in order best to serve young people, Exeter falls increasingly short, clinging ever tenaciously to itself, raising internal political matters over the pedagogical, and avoiding uncomfortable intrusions no matter their content.

A teacher intent upon working well with young students must then think on two levels – one with peers, one with students. This goes on in most schools, but at Exeter the contrast between the two strata is extreme. Those teachers who remain for any length either develop a closeness with the students and a secessionist complex *vis à vis* the institution or become good company people. The first of these is hard for any length of time, as the teacher ages and the students do not. The company person seems ever more dominant among the ranks of faculty poised to lead the school as the older generation moves on. This marks a change from the past. The quirkishness among the older ones appears to have been passed on to few among the new insiders. The rigidity of the old, readily acceptable as a consequence of age, is oddly stronger and less easily acceptable among the young/middle group. Seeing himself left of center in regard to a series of curriculum issues, one older faculty member exclaimed: "If I'm a liberal here, we're in trouble."

The mode of operation of the seminar system and the rigid politics of the Academy has forged a personality type in the faculty that is self-effacing and unanimated. The habits of mind which circumstances produce become part of the collective manner of an institution. At Exeter gregariousness and humor are out of place and potentially threatening. It is certainly frowned upon among faculty in their classes and in official political discourse. Indeed at faculty meetings, despite many an official proclamation of openness, new faculty are privately told it best to be silent for five years and circumspect for fifteen. An Exeter faculty member's manner must be low keyed, if not feckless.

This adamantly "laid-back" tone has emerged due not merely to inertia but to the nature of the demands of the school. Exeter's daily regimen avails little free time for outside academic pursuits. This curbs the

intellectual curiosity of some who once read and contemplated more. Indeed many faculty have come to Exeter at "ABD" graduate-school status or with general interest in professional academic work and found themselves having to give up their ambitions. Those who are able to maintain intellectual activism do so by squeezing the most out of every free minute. One needs to be the sort who can do as much in twelve five-minute segments as in one hour-long one. That type of person tends by nature to be impatient with speculation and with the contemplative side of the intellect. Here, then, Exeter and most prep schools afford not only little but a very particular type of space for professional intellectual pursuits in sciences, the arts, or humanities.

With the personality norm on the faculty uncomfortable with variations, teachers in purely creative fields like art and music, whose endeavors demand a speculative spirit, often find themselves on the periphery of the Academy's political and social climate. The few active in creative, critical, and research endeavors in "mainstream" departments, find themselves on the outs as well. Precious little professional activity takes place there. In some departments a proud tradition of Exeter being an institution in which its teachers publish seems to be fading. Some near retirement lament this. Fewer of middle age seem to care as much. To many of them professional activity should have little or nothing to do with hiring or promotion. Before a few, threatened by such ambition, it can even prove a liability.

Collective pressure rises as the professional interests of faculty increasingly turn uniformly inward. While elders have come to cement their ideas on their own, the concrete appears nervously other-directed among the next generation of school leaders. It is particularly among this group that little professional activity is taking place. While many debate its efficacy as a standard for excellence in educators, publishing, in addition to keeping individuals professionally current, does compel people to define themselves from sources not exclusively within their institution. This refreshes them and their school and provides good examples to students. At Exeter this professional and personal self-definition stems overwhelmingly and unrefreshingly from within. When one official suggested that faculty who go



on sabbatical be required to leave the region, the response was vehemently negative. Just as various departments' nonintercourse with Ph.D.'s is part of the increasingly caricatured nature of the Harkness system, the intellectual implosion of the Exeter community enlarges from an additional Academy policy which refuses subvention of the costs of faculty members' pursuits of higher academic degrees.

As this implosion jumbles and perverts personalities and educational standards, membership and tenure grow more evaluative than descriptive. Conversely, received criticism finds itself rendered merely descriptive of the critic and makes no evaluative impact. Community concerns subvert intellectual ones. Rarely is there the kind of camaraderie that witnesses two people disagreeing over a matter in an official meeting yet an hour later easily convening over coffee or a game of racketball. The very opposite: grudges are held for years even over trivialities. Like any small town Exeter is an extremely gossipy community. Without much intellectual or community activity, people focus only on one another. Young students, amidst any such boredom, turn to drugs and alcohol. Faculty turn, additionally, to gossip and to other institutional games. At many schools and colleges the implicit question on many faculty members' minds in regard to a tenure case involves whether they would care to have coffee with a given candidate for the next twenty years. At Exeter this question has grown frankly explicit. Gossip, things allegedly said in a dining hall, library or gymnasium, whether true or not, all go into the written record. Guilt is presumed if the veneer of collective harmony is damaged and egos are threatened.

Turning ever inward, Exeter holds forth to entering faculty a world with which one has to make peace. Over and over sensitive faculty discuss the institution along these lines of "making peace": "it won't change; you simply have to reconcile yourself to it." One teacher, there over ten years, kept a file of resignation letters he had clacked out at various times but not submitted. While at Exeter it is impossible to determine whatever is irritating and simply avoid it. Some who have been at Exeter for many years and finished their dormitory tenure (usually ten to fifteen years) can achieve a happy separation. To do so they generally have to be wealthy. Housing in southeastern New Hampshire has become very expensive, and the Academy's

salaries and housing subvention measures have eroded with this inflation, a reality with which the school seems unable to cope. Amidst such economic pressures, Trustees are even toying with possible limits on free tuition up to now available to faculty and staff children who gain admission. Independence of wealth will be an ever-increasing prerequisite for survival on the Exeter faculty. Beyond the need for wealth, those who achieve some repose while on the faculty often fall into a cynical perspective in regard to student and faculty issues. While logical, given the institutional culture, this suffused, secessionist outlook proves spiritually destructive to the students, not to mention to the individual him or herself.

If a teacher tries to avoid the bothersome, several days will sail by, but invariably someone will do something to which a response is unavoidable. A student in one's care will be unduly victimized or family will be disrupted. In any such case a thicket of silly politics and egos then have to be confronted. The school is simply too small to let people be. Its ways are so internally focused that they do not always mesh with reality. That contrast is impossible to ignore whenever the reality is important. But the Academy will seldom budge, and here one must make peace. An IBM can operate that way, but an educational institution cannot be so rigid and continue to thrive.

While Exeter clearly resists change at most every turn, it earnestly holds itself as always struggling to adjust. The faculty meets weekly to discuss various issues. These meetings used to have substance. Now committees do virtually everything of importance, and their ranks are generally filled by veteran faculty and women. The meetings have a star-chamber aura among students, an image which contributes to the cold, aloof atmosphere for which Exeter is well known among prep schools. At the meetings matters serious and silly get discussed, and almost always with no resulting legislation. Beyond wasting time, the meetings hold further drawbacks. They give the impression of, but little of the content of, faculty governance, and they rivet faculty attention on campus politics. Rather than strengthening community cohesion, which less frequent meetings would do as well or better, faculty simply end up with more politics to discuss, merely accenting intellectual incest.



At faculty as well as at departmental and other meetings one almost never hears mention of other schools and the lessons they can provide. At such equals as Andover, St. Paul's and Groton faculty regularly refer to one another's pedagogical methods and insights; not at Exeter. Andover, Deerfield and other prep school faculty note Exeter's insularity with more humor than admiration. The Exeter faculty has come to believe they lie far above all others. In fact if there is a difference it is a very slight one between the student bodies. The bottom third students of some schools, whose prestige does not allow them to be as selective, is often weaker than Exeter's or Andover's. But the faculties and standings with colleges reveal Exeter rating in a cluster with a half dozen or so others. It is among the best but in no way clearly the best. But because it thinks it is the best it accepts no lessons from the work of others, thus internally extending the self-image of unequaled quality only to insiders while risking decline in reality.

Trivial in itself, but nonetheless revealing of that ego which pervades the Academy, is the tradition of there being no outsiders speaking at graduation. The only exception occurred in 1958 when President Eisenhower spoke at his grandson's graduation. Otherwise everything is kept internal. The smug message is: we're the best; we need no one else. The actual effect is anything but elevating. Graduation exercises are boring affairs most everywhere, and Exeter underscores this with a decided blandness which many parents note.

Over the years the level of discourse on the faculty has worn down. The forum of the weekly faculty meeting renders crucial some of the silliest faculty preoccupations while dulling the significance of pivotal matters. One faculty member earnestly objected to the fact that he felt alone in shooing students off the grass and demanded support from colleagues. This brought forth more discussion than the following week's treatment of student drug abuse. An Academy trustee lamented that if any business wasted time like the Exeter faculty it would fall into financial bankruptcy. The faculty fosters this intellectually. Indeed when a set of curriculum changes came forth the faculty spent over two years on it. A 40,000-student university might take that long, but it was absurd at a small prep school and revealed the degree to which the thickets of needless petty politics snarl everything.

The curriculum changes returned to more requirements in history, science, and other basics, paralleling the "back-to-basics" trend in modern education. With respect to the discussions of curriculum when the proposals were in the works, several faculty commented on the rather dull nature of the discourse. "This has not been our finest hour," one veteran maundered. Many reflected on their expectation of sparkling discussions of pedagogical theory. Instead came a generally dull spate of vest clutching, turf protection, and mindless narratives to the effect of: "We're fine with St. Harkness, so we should not change." At several special evening sessions for the purpose of fuller discussions shockingly few faculty even attended. (Similarly, Bruno Bettelheim visited the Academy in May of 1985. One evening he held an informal discussion on a variety of topics for all interested faculty. Here with a man of extraordinary wisdom and intellect, but ten of 125 faculty attended.) Concerns for the life of the school have grown pedestrian, and for the life of the mind they have all but died. The resistance to curriculum changes was formidable. Few objected to increasing basics, but many interesting innovative course ideas encountered not merely opposition but consternation. Even in its reduced form, the curriculum barely passed—63 to 52. With the changes the essential corporate culture of the school remains unchanged, and these other components are now more unchallengeable since carrying out curriculum changes has left many with an untoward, smug self-satisfaction.

One facet of the cultural life of the Academy are its "meditation" sessions. The school used to have daily, required chapel, but that is long gone. Now there is an optional Thursday morning session at which faculty and students speak on any topic they choose. Here the growing intellectual torpor is evident. Students and young faculty speakers usually draw good crowds. Established faculty largely draw one another. The focus of the students and young faculty is often philosophical. Older faculty rarely speak in any sort of analytical fashion. Usually they narrate some of their own life's story. At best they are touching, but rarely do they toy to any depth with anything conceptual. The pedestrian tendency here reflects the dangers of communal emphasis now without any external focus. Each speaker implies with his or her autobiography: "I am part of this community, and here is my



story." One has to accept the community ethic to find anything beyond narrative value in the forum, and one dares not criticize it. As with faculty meetings, this meditation forum has devolved into a shell of its former self. Theology, philosophy, moral commentary are absent. "Meditation" is purely on the Academy community which seems to feel it embodies all morality worth discovering.

The apparent apathy and bland sensibilities among the faculty alarm few. That some expected more from one another in curriculum discussions reveals the standards many hope to find and once had. People are too enmeshed within the structure and culture of the Academy to see their own narrowness nurturing the very problem they lament. The school has an intolerable conservatism that grows increasingly phthisic. Causes lie too close to home for too many to permit any surgery, so the problem grows. Meanwhile faculty kid themselves by occupying their time with issues which appear to breathe freshness into the school but merely skim the surface. They worry about the neatness of student dress and the condition of the grass. They preoccupy pedagogical issues with the Harkness system, and with Harkness, intellectual refreshment involves little change but much fundamentalist-like rededication to narrow the hypocritically followed principles. The result is a timid plodding literalism and the rise of mediocrity that festers in a body where form transcends content.





## Chapter III

### Social "Just-Us"

The issues of women at Exeter serve more visibly than any as topics which occupy time and generate great discussions which never get to the heart of the institution's difficulties and, in certain respects, extend them. In 1987 Exeter hired a new Principal. Much has been made of the fact that she is female. The Principal's gender is ultimately of minimal consequence; only her quality matters. Her presence, however, may finally begin to quell the anxieties in which the institution likes to indulge itself over matters of gender. These anxieties are generated not by relics of old male-dominated times, but by nearly as antiquated a group of angry holdovers from 1970-vintage anti-intellectual feminism.

Exeter began admitting women back in 1970 when schools and colleges all over the country were at last ending the silly institutional barriers between the genders of the bourgeoisie. The shift to coeducation was both easy and traumatic. The ease lay in the fact that the school had simply to look for female students from the same wealthy institutions with whom they had been in contact for years. The trauma lay within the Exeter community. Many were upset with the change, and equally many were upset with those who were upset. Some creaky old teachers' misogynist sensibilities grew more visible and obnoxious. Facilities in health services and in the gymnasium lacked new necessities. The number of women on the faculty and staff was tiny. Despite the early structural trouble, many female students did well. Within three years the women who came to Exeter joined a student

body that remembered nothing but coeducation. But they were surrounded by a faculty attuned only to themselves and not to students' increasing calm. While some male faculty resisted change, resistance of a different sort grew among many women in the Exeter community. In the early seventies the women on the faculty and staff developed a sense of camaraderie that meshed with the heady rhetoric of the time. Generally the Academy's administration indulged expressions of political outrage, expecting eventual calm. But calm has not come. Instead Exeter has institutionalized feminism with what one Dean frankly admits to be a "party line." Feminism provides Exeter with a politically convenient forum to dominate the Academy's social justice activities. Consequently, Exeter is able to exclude more fundamentally threatening issues of race and ethnicity. Elsewhere the excesses of an unchanging feminist community provide harmless humor. Often though, they ill serve faculty and students.

Faculty have continued to grapple, at times with guilt-ridden hysteria, with the issue of coeducation. Some issues were silly: was it sexist to demand skirts (or something equivalent) of women and coat and tie of the males? Or is it now sexist to require no jeans but anything else of women while coat and tie and anything else of men? Hours have been spent debating this terribly weighty matter. Some issues remain important, but a gap widens between concerns of normal students and those of faculty still in shock, some of whom are still trying to awaken the world of the nineties to the early seventies.

The earliest proponents of feminism at Exeter came from the bourgeoisie and constituted a subclass with the leisure to contemplate and advocate matters for which the poor had neither the time nor the disposition. The concerns of some chic, dress-for-success women dominate and render feminism a toy of the idle rich. Many of Exeter's politically active women fit very much a Reaganite mold and combine with a few who seethe with the bra-burning anger of the sixties to produce an eclectic assortment of relics who have economically suffered little and nervously compensate with narrowness and stridency.

The concerns of Exeter's feminists are rather amorphous. "Oppression" is the rhetorical leitmotif. One hears discussions of how hard it



is for women. But complaints of back-stabbing politics, dull-witted superiors, and burdensome work-loads constitute variations on the same themes men and women have discussed for years. Feminism simply lends a slightly different vocabulary which masks as much as it reveals. Complaints with real gender specificity seldom come forth. Some have argued, for example, that less dormitory and coaching responsibilities ought to be demanded of women, though such advocates are often uncomfortable with the logic that less pay ought follow. The teaching/dormitory/sports model that prep schools demand of teachers is not sexist. It imposes equal demands on men and women. It is narcissistic and condescending to many women for anyone to assert that females have greater emotional difficulty fitting into the model. The structure impinges on many and reveals not sexism but how prep school teaching suits the personality and lifestyle of very few men or women.

Though many complain along various lines, one looks in vain for vestiges of old-fashioned sexism. Some women complain about not being permitted to enter the political center of the Academy. But generally this complaint comes from women in departments out of the academic mainstream, a problem perhaps, but not one rooted in sexism. One woman in the administration holds "how thoroughly the male ethic permeates the school is just not perceived by people who have not been here a long time." What she revealed here is that the sexism she and other older women perceive is not self-evident. The notion that it can only be felt over time implies a perception which could be true, but which could as easily derive from a momentum of collective memory which does not so much grasp reality as color it. Regardless, it serves as a political shibboleth, cynically or sincerely held, which bludgeons gender-whipped leaders and provides an easy rhetorical cushion on which to fall back and dismiss any questioning of dogma.

More plainly evident than male sexism is a strain of post-feminist humanism. For some women, with feminism so bound up in their political as well as personal beings, political humanism is taken personally as sexism, and the charge is often levelled with McCarthy-like certainty. This failure to distinguish between the personal and the political is narcissistic, an outlook which keeps some from grasping the gravity of the social changes of the past

decades and the obvious fact that troubles befall both men and women in different forms and degrees, with gender being but one factor. The Academy administration outwardly indulges the largely unchanged feminist-based analyses. Their amorphous response is perhaps a logical counterpoint. Still the indulgence does affect morale.

One woman on the faculty held to her students that the bell tower atop the main Academy building was a phallic symbol, hence of terrible psychic impact upon females, and ought to be razed. Such an impulse encapsulates so much good and bad about feminism. On the one hand it opens young minds to new thoughts, yet instantaneously it closes all discourse with dogma which flattens the contours of the spirit. This pattern has been evident in the 100%-mindedness that accompanies various demands. People have unsuccessfully called for a Women's Studies Program, and for some female-only classes in such fields as English and mathematics. Some have called for single women to get extra money to go to such places as Boston on Saturday evenings, the contention being that it is hard for a woman to make the hour-and-a-half drive back and just that she receive subvention to stay in the city for the night. Several psychological counsellors had held that the counselling service ought be exclusively devoted to the problems of females. Equal pay has never been a problem. Age and seniority have always been the salary base at Exeter. Advanced degrees have no bearing on salaries, and this omission discriminates for women as a greater number and percentage of men on the faculty hold doctorates. On the age/seniority basis women do as well and sometimes better.

The problem receiving the most lip service from Exeter women concerns the number of women on the faculty and their presence on various committees. When the Academy began admitting women, the faculty and staff were almost exclusively male, and the climate was at least implicitly hostile to any student, male or female, who needed a woman to talk to or provide any sort of support. The school did not plan well. A concerted effort then grew to bring women into the faculty. As the number of women on the faculty grew the question gradually emerged as to the utility of the single-minded goal of getting more female teachers. At what point of female faculty presence – 15%?, 20%?, ... – ought the administration deem the need



less urgent than when the percentage was close to zero? When ought the need for minority faculty eclipse the priority for women? The harsh superficiality of such numbers games naturally turns many away from such thinking. The narrow call for female role models is continually and dogmatically pursued. No one asks if such a psychological dynamic of an implicit nature can be rendered explicit and remain operative. And indeed at Exeter it usually backfires, as many self-styled role models prove a bit humorous to students. Nevertheless, guilt, momentum, and habit extend efforts and minimize any thoughtful revisions of party-line priorities. Internal politics, given the powerful positions women have gained in the school's structure, also maintain the pressure. The shibboleths of early seventies feminism instantly raise flags against any well-intentioned questioning of dogma. At least outwardly, the Academy accepts this.

One September the leading women on the faculty required all women to stay after a faculty group picture for a separate photo. The result—a picture with so many women in it—rendered the political *cause celebre* of more female faculty less visibly urgent. Not to be swayed by the evidence, the women thereafter dropped the idea of a picture.

The continued indulgence of now dated concerns invariably creates problems. One woman, for example, rose to a position of importance on the Academy staff. She gained faculty status, hence student advising and coaching responsibilities. Her office behavior was rather erratic, at times shrewish. Yet the school maintained her employment. She was once allowed to speak to the student body (about her mountain climbing) at an assembly. The assembly's coordinator was rather gung-ho about making women visible. The speech was atrocious, full of funny pseudo thought, yet funnier since the speaker was serious—"When two people are on a mountain connected by a rope they are one [or two?]." Exeter students can make for a tough audience, though to many speakers they respond warmly. With this speech they went berserk, coughing, laughing, generally making a mockery of the whole thing. Rather than just letting the matter die away, the Dean kept the seniors after the next assembly to allow the speaker to scold them, and she earnestly pointed out to them the "deep hidden meaning" she had put into the talk. All this naturally aggravated matters. The lack of standards in pursuit of female

visibility was revealing enough to the students, but the subsequent counteroffensive illustrated just how far the Administration would push hackneyed political preoccupations, even if they have to step on those they supposedly serve. Some students wrote a letter in the school paper criticizing the whole mess. A Dean took them to task. Privately some Academy leaders will admit they indulge some women for political reasons, holding the long-term payoffs outweigh specific problems. But short-run problems pile up, and long-term goals do not appear to be serving anyone but those causing the problems.

Many students indeed comment on the curious narrowness of some of their female teachers. Other women whom the students like and admire more do not consider the agenda of the school's feminists terribly important. The teachers who feel most strongly about "correct" political thinking and being the proper kind of role model win few faithful followers and more snickers, exasperation and occasional hatred. Several students who played a sport under one woman of a particularly fatiguing political bent made up sweatshirts at season's end with the coach's name on them reading: "I survived Ms. \_\_\_\_\_." Less humorously, several self-styled role models have made sexual advances at female students, indulging in the very same disgusting exploitation of power they have rightfully criticized in heterosexual males. Their homosexuality of course is something the school will never air, though most faculty and students are not concerned. Its closeted nature accentuates the neuroses in the Academy which greatly accentuates the depression so many students sense. Many of these same women are also so caught up in their politics that they unwittingly let students mouth platitudes to curry favor for grades, short-circuiting the learning process, and furthering student cynicism and depression.

Women have achieved many committee appointments at Exeter, in far greater proportion than men with respect to numbers and seniority. This has not been accidental. Half the appointments to several key committees come via faculty election; the rest the Principal appoints, and by these appointments women have gained many spots. In addition to the simple concept of "presence," one hears words to the effect of "different points of view" and "greater compassion" in regard to the wisdom of such staffing



manipulation. Over the years of records of committee work, one looks in vain for evidence of differences. Gender simply does not subsume much of the complex banality of committee work. The payoff of such appointments is largely tribute to the political demands of the women who themselves have the power to press for their needs. No wider purpose exists. The students do not appear to care terribly much. Indeed some of the women's work on the student disciplinary committee has merely reinforced their ugly reputations with students.

Some financial support for women's concerns at Exeter has come from the hotel magnate William Dunphy, who underwrote a "Committee to Enhance the Status of Women." His support was allegedly anonymous, but some faculty have tossed his name around with reckless abandon. Members of his family went to Exeter in the dark ages of early coeducation, and he has generously, though unsystematically, thrown money at a problem that has since taken a very different form. Exeter now regularly sends faculty to secondary school conventions and chooses its representatives, male and female, on a rotating basis. But funds are set aside for women to go "out of turn." Some speakers are invited allegedly to open the eyes of people presumed blind to the changing status of women in the middle class. Before one faculty meeting a woman spoke on integrating women into the curriculum. She focused on history yet was not terribly well versed in the field. The means of integration she suggested fell along terribly pedestrian lines and were of value to no one conversant in any recent historical literature. Those most supportive of the feminist agenda were not so sophisticated and earnestly felt new light had been shed. The women at Exeter and elsewhere who pressure for changes on behalf of middle class women often fail to realize that the people they feel they need to convert are already convinced. Many have integrated sensitivity to women in more subtle, less anger-laden pedagogical manners than many feminists would like. But that is a different kind of disagreement than the either/or outlook onto which feminists need to hold and which the Academy indulges.

Many speakers come to campus to speak to students on women's issues. Here many eyes are widened, though not as much as some activists think, and at times efforts prove counterproductive. Once, in the space of

three days, two speakers came, and each quoted the same passage from Virginia Woolf. The students were very put off. It was sad that the second of these guests, Natalie Zemon Davis, Professor of History at Princeton and 1987 President of the American Historical Association, lost many students by her unknowing repetition. For Davis conveyed a genuine, warm enthusiasm for her work and had much to say and exemplify to students, male and female. The first speaker, Nannerl Overholser Keohane, President of Wellesley, came across a sour administrative type who mouthed old feminist platitudes without a shred of warmth or vitality. The contrast between the two could have been an example to students, but the main memory the collectivity of the two speeches gave students was that of the narrow rhetorical base available to a group of older women with an axe to grind.

The actual Woolf quotation came from *Three Guineas*:

There it is then, before our eyes, the procession of the sons of educated men, ascending those pulpits mounting those steps, passing in and out of those doors, preaching, teaching, administering justice,...making money. And it is obvious that if you are going to make the same incomes from the same professions that those men make you will have to accept the same conditions that they accept. Even from an upper window and from books we know or can guess what those conditions are.

Woolf went on to speculate about the hardness that would come over people following such a path and questioned its worth. Though she was not the only person, then or since, to ponder such matters, her words are important for young women, and men, to hear. Woolf would prefer a more restive pose, writing, as she cast in *A Room of One's Own*, "in my stall, among the other seekers for the essential oil of truth." Maybe it is a more masculine approach, assuming the debatable—that Virginia Woolf represents a true female outlook—but Exeter students of both genders tend not to wait for the essential oil. More implicitly phenomenological, they find it, or make it. Woolf and others instruct judiciously, but if this instruction has excessive influence the effect can be depressive, as Woolf's life illustrates. Often with untoward narrowness, Exeter's female graduates have generally gone forth just like the men. Whether it is altogether good that most modern middle class women go the same routes as the men before them is ultimately



unresolvable, a far more difficult question indeed than whether women should model themselves after Virginia Woolf.

One can wonder whether Woolf would have advocated the same secessionism were she born in times without the many barriers she confronted. But women on the Exeter faculty have sufficiently shelved human ambitions and possess the wealth and leisure time to engage such fantasies. They also have the institutional power to impress their views on others, allegedly for their own good, with much the same smug certainty as those Victorian males who victimized Virginia Woolf.

An often incompletely quoted line from the famous opening of *A Room of One's Own* fully reads: "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." Many both leave out the distressingly elitist "money" matter and forget the exclusive literary end of Woolf's ambitions. Still, in certain matters of lifestyle, some women at Exeter have realized a bit of the nature of Woolf's dream.

Utilizing their power with the administration, the Women's Committee sponsored a conference, purportedly for students, called "Gender Day." They persuaded the Academy Principal to grant a complete day from classes for all students during which they were required to participate in workshops and attend speeches. The night before the students saw the movie *Diner*, presented as an illustration of traditional male sexism. The students knew better. All workshops, despite protests from male and female students and faculty, were gender segregated. The Women's Committee wanted it that way. They originally desired a conference for women only and adamantly refused to change the form of their original design. They could not accept that anything they had hatched could be made open to both genders with no adjustments. So they tacked on men's parts as an afterthought.

General speeches were open to both genders. One guest speaker, expecting to talk to women only, appeared greatly distressed by the presence of males and tried spontaneously to revise her talk. A forensic disaster resulted. It might have been enlightening to young men to hear her thoughts. As it stood, the quality of her presentation was embarrassing.

The conference proved a general bore to students and many involved faculty. Faculty and students appreciated the day off, but the often vacuous content and the antiquated gender segregation proved tedious and silly to the vast majority. Many students resented the presumptuousness of administrators who felt they needed such preaching. The workshops the students liked focused more on humanist ideals than feminist ones, and often on thoughts which countered the Committee's way of thinking. Some students discussed such questions as whether the sensuality of being a woman needs to contradict career ambitions. Why does there even need to be such a separation, asked one: "Why shouldn't a girl use the fact that she is good looking?" This came from a high honors student who needed no prodding from any self-styled feminist role model to realize her potential. Like many Exeter students, this young woman thinks at different levels, beyond what Christopher Lasch dubbed the pseudo-aware banalities of time-bound elders.

A student wrote an article in the school paper criticizing Gender Day, particularly for its gender segregation. Bypassing the newspaper's editors, its faculty advisor and the student's advisor, one Dean, heavily involved in planning the Day, called the student in and chastized him for his editorial, ostensibly for dubbing the occasion "Gender Day," when the day's real name was supposedly "Life after Exeter Day." The Dean presented this justification to the student's advisor when he questioned the wisdom of intimidating students' free expression, which indeed took place in this case. Yet a week later this same Dean put out brochures with "Gender Day" emblazoned on the covers. The Dean's nomenclature justification had been insincere. At issue was a political disagreement with the student. Alarming was the utter certainty of viewpoint which permitted a falsehood to a teacher and a self-blinding from the sensitivity pivotal in any educator's nurturing of free expression.

The storms of controversy that used to surround Exeter's school paper traditionally gave a major spark to the life of the Academy, and many of the heated issues and debates provided some of the alumni's strongest memories. The administration traditionally allowed a free hand to the students. Now there appears an unhealthy willingness to block any tilt of freedom toward perceived evil. Deans have taken several student writers to task for their



written opinions, particularly when they criticize the party line on women. Some have been called before the Dean simply for the use of "he." It is a dangerous road upon which some administrators have embarked. Feminist entitlement has blinded them from the chilling effect which a careless wielding of authority can create.

On another occasion, when a guest speaker warned the students about the dangers of sexual attack, twitters of laughter could be heard from the males. One Dean was told that all should be informed that rape can happen to anyone, particularly now with over forty percent of victims being male. What could have received strong emphasis was that in certain parts of nearby Boston that percentage was close to fifty. But the Dean was unimpressed and made no follow-ups, preferring the half truth of rape as a woman's issue, not a human issue, thus extending incomplete ideologies, dividing people needlessly and shielding them from reality.

Most young women simply do not need the same rhetorical crutches so apparent in prior times when the barriers before women were so much more obvious. The Exeter students grew up with the changes among middle class women. They have heard, virtually from their first conscious thought, urgings to make the utmost of themselves. As at schools throughout the country, young women feel a decreasing need for militancy. To their elders, for whom personal maturation and political consciousness occurred simultaneously, this smacks of reemerging traditional sexism, making them cling more tenaciously to old rhetoric. But this is not sexism. It is not even anti feminism. It is a post feminism increasingly visible among young middle class women who have not had to break down old barriers as they pursue their ambitions. This generation's consciousness and personal maturation did not chronologically coincide. They then roll along without much anger. The historically aware thank their elders for their labor. The psychologically aware lament older women suffused in their holding pattern, where blind sweeping indictments replace thoughtful reflection. But they do not lament too long. To them the old rhetoric is tiresome. One woman invited to speak to the students in 1985 clearly came across an angry early-seventies vintage feminist. She spoke, *à la* Susan Brownmiller, of all men as potential rapists,

all women as victims. As they do to any bigotry, female and male students hissed loudly.

In 1983 the Committee held a summer conference for women educators. One of the organizers rated the conference "off the charts." Others were not so universally positive. The networking in the conferences deepened some personal relations. The survival-kit rhetoric was largely repetitive. The two black women invited found themselves repeatedly called the other's name. Many workshops proved rather simplistic in approach. One showed films of two English classes. In the first a male teacher carefully and methodically slogged through a structural analysis of a poem; in the second a woman more spontaneously highlighted points of the narrative of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. The films purported to show contrasts of teaching style between men and women. Those in attendance saw of greater importance than gender the contrast in the materials being taught.

Overall, when the conference organizers reported to the faculty they emphasized what a smashing success the whole thing had been. Some faculty asked questions, trying to discover anything of lasting value from the conference. One inquired if any of the contacts from the now broadened network have expressed interest in teaching at Exeter. The response was negative. The conference served only the psychic needs of insiders.

The intellectually vacuous indulgences of these insiders comes forth repeatedly. In 1985-86 the Academy went through an outside evaluation. The visiting "experts" generally praised the school but fixated on the statistical point of the number of women on the faculty. One reason for their focus was that the Academy leadership expressly asked them to beat this particular drum, certainly indicating an intellectually corrupt group of evaluators. Beyond the cited data in their critique, the evaluators pointed out further "evidence" supporting a call for more work to be done on behalf of women. They had canvassed female students and said they had found few expressions of concerns for any feminist agenda. Blinded by their own and by the Academy's preoccupations, the thought never occurred to the evaluators that the students simply do not need such crutches. And if students had echoed the party line, the call for more female faculty would have come forth as well; Catch-22.



A few months before the evaluation, the Academy held a memorial service for Edmund Perry, the Exeter graduate bound for Stanford, shot on the streets of his native Harlem by a plainclothes policeman (he was trying to mug). Perry's mother was intentionally kept uninformed of the service. In her immediate grief after the shooting Mrs. Perry had lashed out at the police, and Academy officials did not want such undignified or threatening behavior at Exeter. Mrs. Perry, a woman of strong spirit, had regained control over her thoughts in the subsequent three months since her son's death, so there was no "danger." Indeed it may have been of great comfort to her to witness and feel the love many at Exeter felt for her son. But the Academy would not take the risk. Given their bourgeois roots angry feminists do not threaten.

While the Academy's indulgence of feminism ignores racial and ethnic questions and victimizes students, it also hurts many younger women on the faculty and much of the staff. Not all women on the Exeter faculty subscribe to the party line. They often need more wariness than men about speaking against it. Many young female faculty feel no less proud of their accomplishments than older female colleagues but feel so as human beings. These less visible women naturally resent being treated as sex objects but are less contentious given their lack of paranoia in regard to anything which great intellectual gymnastics can vaguely link to sexism. But while resenting ever being sex objects, they also reject being gender objects. And this is precisely how Exeter's Women's Committee treats its young female colleagues. At the beginning of each school year all new women faculty meet with the Committee where they are lectured, rather condescendingly, on their role as women in the Academy. While some sense of community is forged here, the pleas largely put off many newcomers. "My God," exclaimed one, "I came here to teach \_\_\_\_\_, not to represent some hackneyed old ideas for some hackneyed old b\_\_\_\_\_." Younger men and women entering the faculty have gone through their educational years with the ideas of the women's movement well institutionalized. It is jarring for them subsequently to enter an august academy and encounter some odd folks screaming to the troops to take up arms.

Sharing none of the oppression chic of Exeter's female establishment, young female faculty resent being hoisted into positions of visibility on committees and elsewhere by virtue of gender. It compromises their integrity and unfairly clouds subsequent achievements in the eyes of colleagues. Gender objectification degrades nearly as much as had sex objectification. Beyond this trap, the tendency to push women ahead for others' political needs simply overburdens them with extra work. While this occurs they learn that some of the women now overloading them had in past years successfully finagled the leadership, on account of gender, to lighten their loads, allowing them to turn down dormitory headships or lowering other coaching and dormitory responsibilities.

With the problems of work load, Byzantine politics, plus the normal desires to move onto other things in life (especially to bigger cities), many young women leave Exeter. The voluntary departure of women from the faculty takes place at a faster rate than that of men. The women's committee blindly declares that indicative of continuing sexism. The Administration listens, rendering such a narrow view an official truth. The situation is in reality more complex. Choices to depart usually stem from factors independent of Exeter, but within the Academy genderism is more to blame than sexism, and the strongest source of genderism is the Women's Committee.

The status of female staff and faculty spouses reflects an elite bias in the changes in the status of women at Exeter. Staff secretaries, maintenance people, dining hall workers continue to get high-handed treatment from some faculty, as was so before coeducation. Perhaps a trifle insecure about their professionalism, some faculty women are some of the worst offenders. One woman, who moved in her staff career at the Academy from secretary to a high administrative position, recalls how several who feel among the oppressed, never spoke civilly or even looked at her whenever business took them past her secretarial desk. With her new status a veneer of warmth and cordiality abounds. Professionalism is a pivotal preoccupation among established female faculty. Experiences in older times greatly sensitized them to the respect apt to flow less easily their way from colleagues and from the community at large. The result is an untoward adamancy in maintaining



a sense of professional identity, a posture not only no longer needed but one whose seemier side grows more visible. One member of the Women's Committee raised the matter of concerns of non-faculty women, but her expressions generated nothing more than lip service. Any redressing of problems staff women encounter routes itself through normal personnel channels, and the institution generally responds. If non-faculty women need more the Women's Committee is not helping. Exeter feminists never threaten but extend and deepen the essential Academy hierarchy. Such conservatism dressed in radical chic is essential to their success.

Faculty spouses, in this analysis meaning wives, since no one cares about husbands, do not get the same high-handedness from some of Exeter's established women as do staff people, though a few who have completed academic and professional degrees have found themselves feeling excluded. Most, however, encounter friendship and respect, as when the faculty was all male. Back then the norm involved the faculty wife not working on the outside, helping her husband with duties in the dorm, often being a fill-in mother for the boys, both emotionally and by making lemonade and cookies. With inflation and changed social norms spouses generally work. Indeed in that regard the Women's Committee has been a leader, so far without much success, in calling for the Academy to provide day care. Some of the faculty wives involve themselves with the Women's Committee. Amusingly, these women often find themselves working for the Committee as their predecessors had for their husbands, supporting various functions, handling secretarial chores, taking care of arrangements for food and beverage. Of course many faculty spouses work successfully in various fields outside the school. Few of them have the luxury of time to preoccupy themselves with the issues of the Women's Committee. Many regard the Committee and its members as frivolous. One faculty spouse went farther and simply put it: "The women here are weird."

For Exeter such relatively recent feminist works as Ellen DuBois' *Feminism and Suffrage*, Mary Kelly's *Private Women, Public Stage*, Mary Ryan's *Cradle of the Middle Class*, Rosalind Rosenberg's *Beyond Separate Spheres*, and especially Betty Freidan's *The Second Stage* ought to be instructive for dealing with contemporary issues humanistically. Thinking

feminists have long eclipsed separatism. Insiders at Exeter are more dated. They think a time-bound piece like Carol Gilligan's *In a Different Voice* is the absolute last word. Even in that old context, such a more complex study as Julia Kristeva's *Desire and Language* goes untouched. The narrowness itself is narrow. The gender-whipped, equally unsophisticated leadership accepts this, and neither internal growth nor much service to students results.

Anti-nuclear activist Helen Caldicott spoke at Exeter in 1984. At one point in her speech she specifically addressed women asserting they must make a special effort to awaken people to the horrors of nuclear disaster. "You women," she admonished, "are invariably the ones who make the first step at reconciliation whenever you and your husband have a fight. You must bring that same spirit here!" After her speech someone privately asked her if she actually believed, in view of that admonition, that women have some inside track on the pacific ideals she espouses. Her answer: "No; I say that to awaken housewives and others who are apt to be passive." Tactically that makes sense, but it is unfortunate such an approach unduly divides people. Caldicott is wiser than her rhetoric. Others revel in it and grow increasingly old-fashioned and isolated.

Feminist literary critic Nina Auerbach wrote: "things seem less simple [now]; for many of us and many of our students, feminist criticism has hardened into a sort of dear prison, challenging us to create ourselves yet again." The world has indeed come a long way from Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics*, published the same year Exeter went coed. Thinking feminists have adjusted. But this adjustment has taken place in businesses where everyone's hard, bottom-line orientation keeps intermediately important ideologies in perspective, too rigidly perhaps, but in perspective nonetheless. It has also occurred at universities where other ideologies from neoconservatism to deconstruction interact and generate some, though often not enough, interplay and growth. At Exeter feminist strains can resound against no other ideological fellow travellers. No others are tolerated. The result is no dialectic, no vitality in the feminist sphere or in the Academy. McCarthyism with a feminist vocabulary pervades. No one is served, especially not the students.



## Chapter IV

### Thorns of Racism

As with the issue of gender, the students' sensitivity to issues of race runs rings around many elders. At a symposium the Academy sponsored on the general topic of race relations (no day off from classes here however), official pronouncements from many older speakers basically rehashed all the ideals of the sixties. The speakers were generally trying to raise consciousness and stimulate thinking, but the students had heard it all before. Perceiving the same old rap, students' interest in the symposium waned. No one needed to be reminded of Martin Luther King's wisdom, and students felt insulted by those who treated them as though they needed conversion. Those who nevertheless came to workshops engaged in discussions that left many speakers' concerns far behind. The complexities of how black awareness and racial pride meshes with ideals of integration, or legal questions concerning cases like Bakke and Webber, were too hot or tough for many older speakers. But the students plunged right into them. If only their elders would really listen.

The issue of race at Exeter is an interesting one. The tragedy of Eddie Perry brought this issue out fully. Outwardly it seemed Perry was quite a success story – poor black making it in the fast lane. For Exeter Perry marked a classically successful "raking of the rubbish." Inwardly, however, Perry was a terribly unhappy young man. Press inspection after his death brought this out. Some like the *Village Voice* did a hatchet job. Robert Anson, a *Life Magazine* reporter wrote an interesting article and book after

considerable research. He found Perry living in two distinct worlds, a variation on the old dictum that successful blacks in America have to think on two levels. Perry had trouble with that, though he may have grown into it. A brilliant, serene soul like W. E. B. DuBois could live this duality. Perry, bright but far from brilliant and often allowing himself to be merely slick rather than thoughtful, had to fake it. The faking plagued him as he perversely emphasized street smarts at Exeter and preppiness at Harlem, and he was neither a Harlem street tough nor a black Einstein. Playing to relative strengths rather than expanding himself, Perry imploded into self-compounding loneliness and anger. While his death was tragic in itself, the facts about his life reveal a cauldron bubbling among many black students at Exeter and schools like it, a cauldron of which schools hoping to uplift chosen unfortunates best take careful note.

Robert Anson wrote sensitively of the pressures on Perry, but within this picture he missed the role of the peculiarities of Exeter. Anson still felt Exeter to be a terrific school, and at most outward levels that is true. Outwardly Exeter is a freedom-loving institution. Inwardly it is a welter of security-conscious other-directedness. Just as this timidity kept Perry's mother uninformed of the Academy's memorial service to her son, it plagued Eddie in a myriad of ways. Exeter embodies an essential liberalism which outwardly makes many sincere efforts to recruit and secure scholarships for many black students while inwardly fearing them. The school is always trying to figure out what it can do for (and to) an Eddie Perry. But whatever Exeter does can never involve any genuine sacrifice or change, just earnest, self-gratifying expenditures of time and money. Always to an Eddie Perry or to any newcomer, student or faculty, Exeter's attitude is: you should be very grateful to be here, so don't you dare try to change us. To impoverished black students, such a corporate culture is fearsome. To a street kid from Harlem the specter is impossible to internalize. To do so he would have to allow himself to be vulnerable. The surface/reality dualism of Exeter is something virtually all the students perceive at some level. It is akin to the middle-class world more generally. Many middle-class students can thus readily respond with a guarded trust. An Eddie Perry cannot so easily muster such a pose. For the situation poses a double whammy to a street kid. Not



only is the openness of Exeter a facade, but the ideals have problems in their pure form. Thoreau would not have lasted five minutes in Harlem. And "guarded trust" is a 114th-Street oxymoron. People who want to be free cannot cope with those who merely want to survive. And those for whom survival has been a real issue in their lives cannot harmonize with people luxuriating in the finer dimensions of freedom, particularly if they are doing so neurotically. Eddie Perry knew the puerility of Transcendentalism. (He and several other black students nodded sardonically when I once quoted them Richard Hofstadter's summation of the movement as evangelicalism for highbrows.) Even more he sensed the hypocrisy with which Exeter embraced it. He turned to his security of quasi-street smarts while at Exeter. But because Exeter was undeniably opening doors for him he could not leave, and back in Harlem had to play the preppie. He devolved around the two worlds into virtual schizophrenia. His death was ultimately his own fault for he (and his brother) chose to roll the man who shot them. But to the degree an Exeter education is supposed to implant the courage and character in people to make better choices it failed Eddie Perry. While overtly teaching Eddie many "things," deep down Exeter only taught Eddie deception. For it to do otherwise it would have to alter its entire corporate culture. And many in the institution have neither the intellect to grasp the nature of this task nor, more importantly, the courage to carry it out. More important than teaching things is the forming of character. But it can only do so for those who have the wealth sleepily to wrap themselves in a body whose life cycles are greater than human scale.

Exeter secures scholarships for many blacks and minorities of "high academic risk." This engenders much debate: Should it be done? If several such students subsequently fail, to what degree should the school examine whether or not it failed them? No fully satisfactory answers come forth, at Exeter or anywhere else because they are asking the questions at a purely instrumental level. At that surface, good faith and efforts take place though laced with condescending knee-jerk liberalism. Always seeking bureaucratic answers to human problems, the Academy has a series of sessions for "high academic risk" entrants. Because most of those attending are minorities, the risk of ghettoization tends to eclipse the goal of academic acceleration.

Indeed the predominance of blacks at these sessions struck many as their salient feature and psychologically generated a negative start for some entrants. The entire effort, one student put it, was "basically tacky." The idea was superficially sound but badly managed. As long as new entrants are at base told to be very grateful to an unchanging institution, schizophrenia potential will not subside, and for a time it may be heightened given the neurotic memories of Eddie Perry just beneath the surface of many administrators' thoughts and deeds.

When minority students encounter difficulties, the Academy's leadership, like many middle class liberals, outwardly indulges pleas of those who see virtually any minority in difficulty as a victim. The views of contemporary black intellectuals like Glenn Loury, Walter Williams, William Julius Wilson, Robert Woodson, and even Thomas Sowell have no impact, although all could be instructive. There is no evidence of even an informed rejection of such views. As with women's issues, the vintage of Exeter's political avant garde remains exclusively that of the sixties and early seventies. Nothing more recent makes a dent.

Beside this old-fashioned liberalism a few genuine conservatives and reactionaries remain at large. The Trustees are absolutely unyielding about their South African investments and treat student and faculty critics with high-handed contempt. To a teacher, one trustee also exploded over his friend's experience upon bringing his daughter to be interviewed for admission: "Do you know that the student who showed them around campus was a negro!"

When writer James Baldwin spoke at Exeter, an organization of black students from nearby University of New Hampshire came down to Exeter to attend an evening discussion with the Academy's guest. They were turned away at the door, even though other non-Academy people were attending. Had a women's student group from another school sought to attend a presentation by Gloria Steinem, the woman attending the door would likely have reacted very differently.

The story of one young woman's Exeter career reveals much about the complex of prejudice and misfortune with which the Academy has yet to grapple effectively. Her saga bears resemblance to that of Eddie Perry. The



end was (is) less spectacular but in certain respects just as tragic. It exposes levels of racism at Exeter as well of certain levels of pernicious sexism with which the Academy's white women never contend and in certain respects exacerbate.

A ninth-grader from the Bronx, let us call her "Linda," arrived at Exeter. The shock of the extreme geographical transition was reverberating through her as she sat in her new room. Soon her middle-class roommate arrived, her impressive belongings and father in tow. Without saying hello or anything civil to Linda, the father flew into a rage over Linda's race. He offered Linda a plane ticket to any destination in the country if she would agree to change rooms. The principal faculty advisor in the dorm intervened. Rather than offer a friendly shoulder, he actually advised Linda to accept the bribe. From that beginning, Linda's career at Exeter was bumpy. She did change rooms after her roommate's father pestered the Dean for several weeks. Linda moved into a room by herself.

Linda had academic and social troubles as well. Grades hovered from D to F. Overweight and shy, Linda also developed no compensating excellence in sports or social activities. Her friendships focused on other black students. She could never establish a relationship with any black male student, however, though she very much wanted to; she even became a "gopher" manager for a sports team on which many blacks played. Students and faculty liked Linda but found her disengaged, even vague. Meanwhile her academic work never got on track. She was allowed more continuing semesters on academic probation than the Academy normally permits. Hours were spent on her particular case in whole faculty meetings. But after almost four years Linda was dismissed. Several hundred students protested, demonstrating in front of the administration building and disrupting one usually joyous alumni occasion.

Linda went home to the Bronx. While Eddie Perry continually endured the sneers of his Harlem neighbors that he was arrogantly abandoning his people, getting big-headed, Linda felt the more searing counterpoints—"You're a failure." With the pulls of Harlem vs. Exeter, Eddie devolved toward schizophrenia. With the cruel weight of a Bronx community expressed here with perverse license, Linda fell into the social

depths of her community. She dropped out of high school and, unmarried, got pregnant.

Eddie Perry's death made the network news. Linda's saga will make no headlines. But it illustrates just as well if not better the complexities of modern American race relations. Like so many status schools, Exeter holds out a hand to selected poor blacks. In certain respects it goes out of its normal ways to assist them. But the efforts have limits, and their manner and content are largely bureaucratic. The basic outlook towards blacks remains sink or swim, and the logic in support of this laissez-faire approach, while humanistically narrow, is compelling and convenient. It permits blithe, official disregard of the soulful pain of many promising, poor entrants, pain sometimes more severe and less visible among females like Linda than among males like Eddie Perry. Yet in regard to minority females outspoken women on the Exeter faculty have been quiet. Their silent priority is clearly for middle class women. The administration readily accepts such a hierarchy. With such support as William Dunphey's the monetary imposition has been minimal while the financial pressures from class-based racial issues are not. The demands of a rich female, or her father, get the nod in any crunch.

In 1983 an Admissions Committee report appeared with wording about the need to keep striving for more black and minority students. No one disagreed. Some did raise the point that the school ought seek worthy black students from areas relatively close to the Academy. The advice made sense, given the difficulties of black students living in Exeter where normal radios cannot pick up black stations, where combs the local stores sell are only fine-tooth, and where local barbers have no experience with black customers and can be anxious if not hostile around them. Someone but an hour or two from home and family might have an easier time adjusting than another from thousands of miles away. But the point was rejected. It clashed with Exeter's sense of itself as a national school. To recommend official policy that implies more regional status cuts against the grain of a collective ego which thus limits the Academy's ability to make most effective use of its precious resources earmarked to help minorities.

In the same Admissions report lay further illustrations of these limits. Several pages later, in contrast to the section calling for efforts to increase



minority enrollment, lay discussion about female students. At that point, noted the report, "girls" made up 44% of the student body. Considering whether to strive for 50%, the report declared this should not be done until there are more women on the faculty for "the girls need role models." Female students scoffed at this. "Role models on this faculty?" asked one. Students prefer good faculty over those of a particular gender, and today need role models to a lesser degree than some faculty need to feel needed as role models. Beyond the politically self-serving component in the report, and beyond the insult with which it slapped students, the presence of such wording in regard to females and its absence for minorities was revealing. Exeter indeed has few minority faculty. And some of them are embarrassingly ineffective, to the consternation of both colleagues and students. Asked about the need for minorities over women on the faculty, the report's author opined: "Blacks do not need role models as girls do." The complex questions that statement broached over innate and social race and gender needs can never be resolved, even by a group of alleged experts. Psychologists cannot agree on what personality is, much less what goes into it or what racial or gender differences lie therein. The smug confidence of the Academy official's assertion illustrates, however, an anti-intellectualism, a severe limit on the sensitivity of the Academy, and, most importantly, a key priority of middle class women over blacks, and over some black females especially.

When Robert Anson was preparing his book on Edmund Perry he interviewed Michael Forrestal, son of FDR's Secretary of the Navy and then Chairman of Exeter's Board of Trustees. About Perry's death the patrician attorney commented "this is not the sort of thing that is supposed to happen to an Exeter man." Indeed it does not happen to middle-class Exonians. Thus when middle-class females who lie beyond "this sort of thing" present the Academy with a convenient squeaky wheel, attention and resources follow down this path which threatens so little. "But," Forrestal asserted, "do we still want to have blacks? Of course we want to have them." The now former Principal Steve Kurtz echoed Forrestal's aloof condescension. He once declared to Anson that Perry was "a solid citizen, no trouble, no violence, no drugs." He further asserted "we know who those characters are

here, and Eddie was not one of them." Of course Eddie was very much one of those characters. When Anson confronted Kurtz with these realities of Perry and of Exeter's racism and out-of-touch authority Kurtz was crushed and sincerely wondered "how do you get to these kids. How do you let them know we're on their side?" The answer is: let them know by genuine, not merely bureaucratic, care and action. Mere extra meetings and discussions white administrators have for blacks at Exeter invariably fail. They impart a sense of caring as much as do extra requirements from welfare case workers.

In their souls blacks at schools like Exeter know they are showpieces. Cynically they know they can use the school to get ahead, so they often learn to play the institution's games, to "put one over on people," as Eddie Perry used to say. With such a perspective, they develop no affection for the place. Even if they cannot articulate it, they know the school essentially cares only about itself. But because they cannot fully return to their own people they are left in the middle and risk ending up caring only about themselves. This is what was happening to Eddie Perry. His strong-willed mother had planted in him a success orientation that unfortunately involved more a neurosis and anxiety over failing than a thirst for knowledge and success. Eddie then more readily learned to play the right games and mouth the right platitudes. He was bright enough to outshine most every kid from Harlem, but at Exeter he found himself slightly below average intellectually. His anxieties rose, and he quelled them by superficially playing upon the easily perceived guilt of his teachers and classmates, boring and turning off those who saw through him. Had Eddie lived he would have likely gone the same spiritually vacuous route at Stanford and from there done a law or business degree and landed on his feet on Wall Street, where he had a job the summer he died. There his well-honed gamesmanship would have stood him perfectly. He would have succeeded in a financial sense, but deep down he could have easily ended up a very unhappy man. Such a saga is hardly unique of course. Some social critics cynically find it the very essence of the life of the modern urban professional. While droves of white middle-class men and women lean toward such modes of existence, the potential psychic difficulties for them are not as overtly severe as for an Eddie Perry. Middle-class youth live within the vacuities and hypocrisies from birth. Most learn to cope with them



without going too crazy, at least outwardly. But for kids from outside the middle class the psychological risks of moving into "the fast lane" are greater. When they have a spiritual bedrock from their family, their religion, their soul they remain essentially safe and sane. Eddie had no such soul.

Perry's death indicates to some that the noble middle class efforts to lend a hand to the poor are not only useless but dangerous. But such a conclusion rests on Eddie being taken as a typical example of the best of black youth, and the sad fact is that only in a superficial sense was he such a luminary. The more difficult lesson of his death is how utterly careful schools like Exeter have to be in their efforts lest more such blow-ups occur, loudly or quietly.

In the immediate aftermath of Eddie Perry's death, people did not know many of the sordid details about Eddie and had not sorted out their anger, feelings and thoughts. On the minds of many black students from Exeter was their sense of how Eddie, like themselves, had been a showpiece and that the school really did not care. Thus when Trustee Forrestal and Principal Kurtz went to Perry's funeral and offered condolences to black students, no one would shake their hands. That hurt Kurtz and Forrestal who outwardly want to use Exeter to help minorities. But they are suffused, and when they get back to Exeter other priorities soon eclipse needs of social justice. Amidst the lovely New Hampshire scenery they forget the harshness of the streets and permit a Social Darwinist perspective to justify neglect. Within the tight genre of social justice white women get virtually all day-to-day attention. The highly sensitized kind of work that must take place to use the resources of the Academy for purposes of promoting social justice is not understood, much less attempted. Whether it can actually be done at Exeter or anywhere remains vexing.

As it stands the Academy follows a simple course when it comes to social justice. Women's issues receive vastly more money, attention and lip service than concerns of race or ethnicity. The reason is simple: it's easier. All over the country women have made far greater strides than any minority in the professions and in other formerly closed areas. In schools the fundamental division of whether the institution exists for the sake of educating minds or socializing bourgeois personalities finds reflection

between the conflicts over middle-class women's needs and those of minorities. Where socializing is the implicit priority, as it seems at Exeter, women get the nod. More overtly, gender issues have been more fully addressed at Exeter for the obvious reason that it is not hard to tap the females from those sources already sending males. Screening teacher application vitae, departments can obviously pick out females with infinitely greater ease than minorities. And some departments do just that. To be sure it is just to turn a predominantly rich WASP male school into a rich WASP one. But, as an old song used to say, it's not justice; it's "just us."

A century and a half ago Alexis de Tocqueville shrewdly observed the tensions in a democracy between liberty and equality. In the educational institutions of a democracy liberty is essential to the promotion of intellectual and spiritual growth. Feminism has thankfully widened these avenues, but its quest for equality has come to intrude upon liberty. Many free processes which nurture intellectual and spiritual growth were and are incessantly side-tracked over humanistically trivial matters. Significant percentages of time spent in a scientific laboratory or in an analysis of a Shakespeare play focus on the gender character of the subject or process at hand. When such foci take up too many hours equality comes to constrict liberty. Additionally the liberating impact of such foci is now nil, for the old feminist agenda and rhetoric has become a *cul de sac* whose points are needlessly repeated and appeal but to a few for whom they mask inner neurosis and fears of aging, loneliness and death.

In many sectors, feminism's rhetorical agenda continues in force because of a failure of leadership. Coincident, and related, to feminism's rise, educational institutions have grown more administratively bureaucratized, thus distant from the essential processes of education they originally served. Suffused administrators care less for education and more for bureaucratic demands, now often distinct from education, at times hostile to it. While often intelligent, they often have not the intellect to grasp the problem of such a gap. Whether or not that is the basis for their success up the administrative ladder, it is certainly the basis of their spiritual torpor which then fatiguingly indulges pressure groups with easy clichés more than it wisely leads its charges with intellectual depth.



Bureaucratization has slowly transformed educational institutions into political ones in which competing lobbies vie for power and status. To play this game old-fashioned intellectuals concerned with pursuing the life of the mind and with educating students must contradict their *raison d'être*, a desultory process from which good administrators formerly shielded them. Of course intellectuals invariably play this political game terribly, and get beaten by less intellectual, politically tighter groups, among whom feminists have been the most successful.

As a successful political pack, feminists have grabbed many administrative posts. Long ago thoughtful women and men achieved the laudable goal of comprehending male biases in various intellectual processes. All modern feminists have achieved is a bludgeoning and numbing of the spirit of intellectuality. Beyond the ease with which their rhetorical vapidness conveniently meshes with the lazy needs of fatigued bureaucrats, feminism's success has involved their ability to outstrip other pressure groups like blacks and ethnic groups due to their essentially unthreatening relationship to the institution's bourgeois class basis.

In such a debotched state, administrative leaders merely point to their "openness," i.e., their absence of discrimination. This actually means the lack of discrimination against some women while discrimination against minorities continues and while everyone has grown increasingly bereft of any of the positive attributes of being educated, discriminating souls. It is an openness that is really quite closed.





## Chapter V

### The Students

Admidst the plethora of half-baked efforts at human manipulation, Exeter students often become pawns in a poorly played game of sociological chess. When one department had finished dispensing prizes for various academic achievements, its awards coordinator mentioned the next day that he had gone through the list of names and wanted all to know there were enough awards to girls. His matter-of-fact tone deepened the shock. The students think academic awards stem from a meritocracy blind to anything but quality. They ought not be so sure. Along similar lines, when Exeter sent a team to a New Hampshire high school version of college bowl, one Dean demanded the team on television for the final round be at least half female. The students themselves rejected the idea. In itself such administrative manipulation is no great issue—just silliness. But it illustrates how the faculty, acting ostensibly for the good of the school, whose alleged function is to serve educational needs of students, are so enmeshed in their own political labyrinths that they risk doing damage and help no one.

Generally students do wonderfully at Exeter. The school, of course, prides itself on the quality of its output. But the self-congratulations are illusory. Back in the late eighteenth century good students began coming to Exeter. It became a pipeline to Harvard. Indeed before World War II three quarters of all Exeter graduates had gone to Harvard. (With virtually the same ratio, Andover used to feed Yale.) Before 1940 about the worst school an Exeter graduate attended was Dartmouth. Good students thus kept

coming and generated an atmosphere which continuously brought out the best hard work in others, enabling the faculty to be very demanding. This qualitative cycle has continued largely unabated for 200 years.

There were some rough times, particularly in the years following the Civil War. The adolescent industrial revolution and the *nouveaux riches* it spawned bowled over many older mores and customs. For a generation the older avenues of power and prestige in America, like the New England Academies, fell into neglect. And from 1865 to 1890 Exeter was an essentially irrelevant institution in regard to what was moving and shaking the country. Virtually anyone who could pay the tuition could gain admission. But when the new rich wanted to educate their sons and give evidence of their respectability, they turned to the conventions of older elites. By 1900 the bourgeois industrial world was shifting from open competition to cooperation and often convenient regulation. Amidst this consolidation and legitimization, pedigree counted increasingly heavily. In this spirit the late nineteenth, early twentieth century marked the time of the establishment of the first country clubs and elite societies. Similarly many prep schools began and grew out of the stratification demanded by the wealthy. Taft, Hotchkiss, Choate, Middlesex and Deerfield all began between 1885 and 1905. With an Episcopal affiliation which deepened patrician roots, Groton, St. George, and Kent opened in these years as well. At the same time Exeter, Andover, and St. Paul's emerged from their torporous states and achieved preeminence. Exeter had but 200 students in 1880, 290 in 1900, over 400 by 1905, and 660 by 1920. Andover and St. Paul's grew similarly. Once again admission was competitive. This growth in size and prestige occurred with the socioeconomic shifts of the turn of the century. Internal Academy dynamics served at best as mere handmaidens. As long as pedigree and the Harvard connection remained important, rich able boys applied, allowing great selectivity and high standards through the first half of the twentieth century.

Since 1945 Harvard has widened its range of sources of students. Now out of 300 Exeter graduates per year, forty to fifty go there. Andover gets the same ration. (Ninety from Andover and Exeter is Harvard's quota.) Forty to fifty of 300 is impressive. Still, it is quite a switch from the seventy-five



percent of older times and may be indicative of a slide which the faculty do not or will not notice, at least in a manner which lends itself to any sober stock-taking. Excellent students continue to come, and given the wretched quality of a shamefully large number of American high schools, this should continue. Some students lament, a bit egotistically perhaps, that they have such competition getting into Harvard or Yale from Exeter while they could more readily gain entry from their local high schools, presuming there they would rank in the top ten. It is too bad they see their life so narrowly and mechanistically, with the content of learning with such remarkable peers being apparently secondary to the pedigree of where one goes from there. Maybe such an outlook reveals wisdom in the number ceilings Harvard and others at least implicitly impose. Although these days virtually all their students, preppie or otherwise, appear quite materially orientated.

Though Harvard and Yale are more difficult to crack, Exeter students still generally go to excellent schools. The momentum of a historically strong student body keeps students coming. Consequently standards continue to be high. They would fall if the quality of students sagged, and some faculty hold both are. The general home preparation of American students has fallen, and even Exeter inherits the passivity and TV brain rot that eclipses war and rivals drugs as *the* danger to youth. In a few respects the Academy risks limiting its pursuit of excellent students. Just as quotas used to be imposed around the country against the Jews, the Asians—the new Jews—appear to have the keenest work ethic and, just like the Jews two generations ago, are drawing resentment. Rumor has it that MIT now stands for "Made in Taiwan." "Lee" is the most common surname at Exeter, and not for any upsurge of Virginia intellect. Some Exeter faculty desire to cap the Asian wellspring. English teachers particularly grope for justification along the lines of excessive literalness of mind, forgetting that problem is more generically modern than ethnic or racial. Despite the specter of such limits, quality remains among Exeter students. College board scores average 600 verbal, 650 math. And there is no Stanley Kapian in town, though more than a few students have been known to ghost take for others. (Exeter has Saturday classes, so the students take the tests at the local high school where the supervisors do not know them.)

The obvious point to any teacher outside Exeter is that with such superb, motivated students one could virtually send them off to a good library, and they would come out just as well or better educated. A teacher of even mediocre quality cannot miss with Exeter students. But Exeter teachers disagree, and in a sense a few prove it. The closed culture of the institution compels everyone at least to give lip service to the Academy's allegedly unique ways, particularly the Harkness system. This allows the faculty to sustain their need to believe they and their methods are responsible for the excellence of their graduates. Boring teachers feel they are superb instructors. A committee set up in 1983 studied and recommended curriculum changes. In the course of their work they studied other schools and naturally encountered some excellent teaching. One member of the committee commented on how the members had to be extraordinarily circumspect about stating such praise of outsiders. For to do so would tread on too many insecurities. No one dares assert that some teaching elsewhere might be as good or better, and that Exeter teachers are simply lucky to have such students as they have. Exeter's excellence clearly stems from historic and external factors, just as had its prior rises and falls. But the faculty continue to kid themselves that the reasons for the quality are present-day and internal. The problem is that while excellence comes from outside, internal egotism indulges such mediocrity and risks biting the hand that feeds.

The smug, self-deceiving sense of internal value manifests itself in ways which risk decay, but the deception bothers students little as long as they encounter no difficulties. Most go through the Academy with but the normal adolescent bumps and proceed wonderfully with their lives. Students who have problems, however, encounter a largely unresponsive institution. Indeed among the major prep schools of New England, Exeter has a reputation for being extraordinarily cold.

Exeter's reputation for coldness is widespread. Parents who take their children to visit New England schools regularly hear from admissions officers words to the effect of: we have excellent academics here and a great placement record with colleges, and we do it without the brutal, neurotic atmosphere you find at Exeter. This reputation marks quite a contrast with



the past. Up to World War II the church-based New England schools compelled students to live in a terribly paternalistic and rigidly supervised atmosphere. Andover and Exeter were more permissive. At this point Exeter had just instituted its seminar system, and the newness of a then uncemented intellectual foundation generated a more innovative and imaginative environment relative to its era. Students came out of the institution more socially conscious and active than many contemporaries. According to E. Digby Baltzell, Exeter and Andover graduates at Harvard in those years tended toward greater involvement in the Cambridge and Boston community than did St. Paul's or Kent boys, who imploded non-academic energies more narcissistically on Harvard's elite clubs. The social conscience of Exeter graduates has faded as it has remained closer to its 1940-vintage permissiveness, now quite rigid, and other schools have adapted more readily to changing times. Now social commitment seems an increasing rarity among Exeter students. The school's leadership is concerned about this. Speakers, external and internal, have exhorted students along these lines. There appear to be loads of cracker-jack MBA's and lawyers in the offing, but few teachers and social workers. Harvard's Eliot House, the ultra-swish country club of dormitories, is now replete with Exies.

Exeter's current image as a cold, aloof place is rooted in the faculty's sense that it is the best, not in a cluster among the best, but above all others. The false, internally focused view of the cause of Exeter's excellence cements itself ever more firmly as the reality of its status dims. It is no longer and will likely never again be the feeder of Harvard. It no longer holds the largest endowment of the prep schools. In 1940 it had \$7 million; Andover had \$6 million; Groton was a distant third with \$1.5 million. Exeter's faculty is no longer the best paid among the prep schools. It is now just below the fifty percentile point of salaries. Inflation has hurt. The trustees also blew \$30 million, a third of the endowment, in the stock market during the 1973-75 crash. And several times the Academy began building projects with less than 100% costs in hand, expecting the rest to flow in during construction. When it did not endowment principal had to be tapped. Now various trustees call for no more building without all costs in hand, an increase of enrollment of fifty more day students, to be simply packed into existing facilities, and limits

on housing subvention and tuition, formerly given to all faculty and staff children who gained admission. A sense of declining status is generally detectable. As surroundings grow less stable, some in the Academy community do not adjust but cling ever more tenaciously to their collective, internally-focused ego, dismiss financial problems with an attitude that "Uncle Phil" will take care of it, and grow ever more intolerant and cold to troubles that arise which they have the power summarily to squash.

This anxiety is one key as to why the school is so closed to criticism from newcomers and has such a reputation for unresponsiveness to students' needs. Such a mentality links all problems to an overall slide and prefers simply to wish them away. The spending of money for professional therapists, for example, makes many faculty shake their heads and lament: "We never used to need that." The same sensibility holds little empathy for an individual whose troubles imply all is not to be praised at Exeter. If faculty would but comprehend Exeter's greatness stems from sources beyond them, they might be less self-conscious and rigid and be better able to adapt and face troubles. If they did the school's greatness might flower a bit more from within. But at present the Academy seems to say to students and to new faculty that they ought be very grateful to be there. It is their duty to make Exeter shine, not the other way around. Besides, with any troubled student many in the Academy suffuse themselves with the knowledge that he or she will be gone in but a few years. They are transient, so are their problems. The Academy leadership prefers a pose that suggests all is smooth sailing. Hence when any waves roll forth, the one appearing to be making the waves, no matter the reason, finds him or herself on the defensive. "We all get along fine, therefore the trouble must lie with you" is the corporate response that covers a multitude of troubles.

But the troubles are real, and they will not go away. Some students have mild levels of dyslexia that grow apparent during their years at the Academy. Subsequently they encounter difficulties, particularly with languages. Many a teacher's attitude is: tough it out or get out. The administration seems unable to do anything but hope the matter subsides. Anorexia and bulimia are other traumas which engender either a John Wayne or a whimpish response. "Why don't they just eat something," mutter



some about anorexics. Many sincerely want to help but have not a clue, or lace half-baked approaches with silly ideologies. One school psychologist proposed group sessions for students with eating problems but wanted them for females exclusively. Many who needed help and who could have profited from such a dynamic were excluded and, in effect, told they did not count.

Student problems with sexuality receive no official attention. In the old all-male times the issue went untouched, except by the students of course. And in those days the issue of homosexuality was certainly a factor in boarding school life. With coeducation homosexuality has by no means disappeared, quite the contrary, and naturally heterosexual issues have grown. A good thing the Academy does in this regard is quietly permit the Health Service to maintain a policy of confidentiality in all matters regarding sex, as well as drugs, alcohol, and general health. With respect to sexuality, the infirmary quietly gives out birth control information on request, but the student or dormitory advisor usually had to take the initiative. For until 1985 there was no overt policy or official preemptive action. With such political necessity of secrecy, students have often remained uninformed. Anxiety, guilt, shame all quietly fester. The Women's Committee, though one might think would be active here, is silent. They are not disposed to challenge the Academy hierarchy, their loyalty being more institutional than gender-based.

Students who get pregnant (about fifteen a year) are quietly sent for abortions. While an obvious ordeal in itself, the secrecy with which the matter is handled heightens the trauma, as many of the young women feel like lepers. Counselling is available but hush-hush. It might be psychologically beneficial for the students if the school were more open about the matter. Some students might prefer to go through with the pregnancy; open discourse on the subject might also prove preemptive, but either prospect has to be avoided. Such beneficial openness is not politically feasible. Internal Victorianism and a preoccupation with image before parents and the general public are too pervasive to challenge. Damaged student health is the consequence.

Detractors grumble about the infirmary's policies giving license, and the Dean has occasionally been perched outside the infirmary door on Saturday nights, claiming to be waiting for someone. With such attitudes, the

Academy could never take many strong steps to grapple openly with the issue of sex. Overlooking possibly preemptive effects, many in the school would consider the subject inappropriate. Others would try to reduce and pervert issues onto a mindless plane of feminism. Many parents would also howl. Though many would see the wisdom of such a move, others feel they pay over \$10,000 a year to be kept from such intruding adolescent headaches. When the Principal wrote a cross-section of Exeter parents, asking what general stance the Academy ought take on parenting, the response was overwhelmingly in favor of toughness. Of course in the abstract such a view makes sense. But for those who do the actual parenting, matters are more complex. Generally parents realize this when one talks to them individually. But when dashing off a tuition check or answering a note from the Principal, abstraction and a high sense of entitlement prevail. Politically the school has to respond, and administratively it is easier to take false mandates at face value. When political logic eclipses social responsibility, when the outwardly Victorian mood of some patrons expresses itself, and when genuinely Victorian/feminist faculty wield power, a most imposing wall blocks intelligent discourse on terribly important topics and maintains a perspective that all in sight is calm and rosy. This is the difference between *managing* a problem and *leading* students toward greater enlightenment. Exeter merely manages.

A student once went to his advisor and told him he was contemplating suicide. His adviser tersely sniffed, "Well we all have our little problems." Such efforts to trivialize matters can prove the best course at times. But they come forth too often at Exeter, and suicide contemplation is seldom best trivialized, particularly in view of the high rate of attempts at the Academy and among middle-class youth in general. The desire to trivialize appears further to focus on managing and maintaining calm. Knowing when to lead versus when to manage requires wisdom, for one can overdo either. Such wisdom cannot be taught. It can grow with experience and be nurtured by example, but it cannot be systematized or packaged as a set of guidelines. Yet this is precisely what Exeter imparts through its elaborately built up system of rules. Just as with classroom teaching, new Exeter faculty are treated as blank slates in regard to non-academic duties. The way to be an



effective school person is apparently to grasp the ways and traditions of the Academy. A small measure of such hierarchical devotion is necessary. Anything beyond yields diminishing returns. For the students have little such devotion to the hierarchy. They are and ought be devoted to the functions of learning and moving beyond the Academy. A gap naturally exists, as at any school, between faculty devoted to the institution and students devoted to their ephemeral selves. It is a gap that can be too narrow or too wide. One of the mistakes of many of the educational "innovations" of the sixties involved a failure to accept the legitimacy of such a gap. Exeter's failure is the opposite. Between the worlds of the faculty and students looms a grand canyon. Aside from a few exceptional, and usually young faculty, no bridges exist. Cold pseudo connections come through the rules and the disciplinary processes, mechanisms which ultimately seek a harmonious veneer more than direct problem-solving.

Recent developments in the structure of the Academy reveal how this gap is widening. In the past teaching faculty staffed all administrative posts. Non-academic form then followed academic function. Increasingly various administrative jobs have fallen into the hands of non-teachers, non-teachers without even formal training in administration. Focusing ever internally, the Academy has rewarded faithful service from its staff and promoted them. Here it crossed an important line and allowed function to follow form. The faculty would never permit a non-academic to hold an administrative post which concerned itself with faculty matters, but they have acquiesced to this very transformation in the apparently less important administration of student matters. Those promoted have often been more loyal to the institution than generally wise or learned. One newly appointed administrator felt sufficiently insecure to ask an English instructor to check her memos for grammatical and spelling errors. But such mechanistic shortcomings pale before the absence, among those administering student affairs, of a personality that promotes any of the good-natured camaraderie with the students one might think be a high priority for such posts. Bit by bit this leads an adversarial relationship to displace a cooperative one between an outwardly cold administration and faculty and students. And this usually

engenders insecurity, turf protection, extra paperwork, and hard administrative decisions being put off.

Several years ago a student charged with drinking had to sit down with the Dean to be briefed about disciplinary procedures. The Dean was one of her teachers. They knew one another on a level more profound than a mere administrative one. As she recalled, the twinkle in his eye as he explained the discipline process humanized what was otherwise an ordeal. Today such a student encounters a full-time administrator who relays procedures often with knowledge and consistency but never with a shred of warmth or with any of the good humor that can only come from someone with a broader sense of purpose and perspective. Consistency and knowledge are absolute necessities for an administrator in any context. But in an institution that handles the emotions of youth and not the data of computers, such necessities ought to be mere prologue to something more humane. "Respecting the student" is an old refrain at Exeter. For it genuinely to operate in the context of discipline, elders must always be willing to explain "why." Students often comment how such a question these days leads Deans and administrators simply to assert "because rule X says so." This of course neither displays nor earns respect. To expect more places a high demand upon administration, a demand which cannot be met by a superficial smile or a thank-you-for-sharing-that-with-us pastiche, but one which a leading preparatory school ought meet. It used to.

Having less of the rationality of elders, young people respond to surroundings more instinctively and wholly. The respect students then afford their masters does not stem from a process which mechanistically separates different school functions. Teachers students like and admire are almost always capable in both academic and non-academic contexts. While students do not separate functional criteria in their judgments of superiors, the Academy leadership does not grasp this. They kid themselves when they place non-academics in important posts which affect students, rationalize it on the basis of criteria important largely to administrators, and expect students to accept it gladly. It never happens.

The faculty's permitting such stiffness to emerge in the administration of student affairs reflects not hostility but anomie in regard to leadership and



apathy toward the non-academic genres of student life. Though in theory they govern the school, faculty have permitted aspects of the administration to grow distant with a needless number of committees and essentially peripheral issues like feminism intervening. They have also lost touch with students, with what really goes on in their lives, and outside the classroom see students as dangerous, an attitude that is self-fulfilling. Others simply do not care.

This is not a time for not caring, for the troubles of modern youth are growing. Exeter's *in loco parentis* must confront the increasingly depressive behavior of many young people involving drugs, alcohol, and suicide. It is an acute problem with many causes. Beyond the general factors in society at large, some causes are pronounced at Exeter. Many competitive students feel a loss of personal status, having often been stars at previous schools. Others from high bourgeois society have very competitive parents who pressure them in any number of ways. One parent who had to take his daughter home for a few weeks because of bouts with bulimia ranted: "I just don't understand this, we always tell \_\_\_\_\_ that her books are her only friends. She shouldn't try to make friendships here since they'll soon be gone." Some divorced parents pressure their children caught in the middle. "You want to spend Christmas with me, don't you?" demanded one neurotic of her then more neurotic daughter. Having attained the distinction of entry into Phillips Exeter, students often feel parents see them as status symbols and regard parental love and approval as prizes to be won. And those who do not fare spectacularly, and even some who do, grow anxious and guilty over living up to others' expectations. With families weaker and other such previously strong institutions as churches largely out of the picture, rootlessness begets valuelessness. And it is indeed hard for schools to handle all such terribly vexing problems while simultaneously trying to educate.

The heart of student-faculty relations is the advisor system. Each faculty member has ten to fifteen students in his or her charge to advise on academic and personal matters. Many faculty do conscientious jobs. Others are merely attentive to official procedures and do not spend the time with students informally to develop the closeness necessary to see the human dimensions of their ups and downs. Others do not care. One older faculty

member advised a newcomer: "Don't get close to your students; don't counsel them; don't bake them cookies." The parents of one student recalled their son's advisor sniffing at them: "It is not our job to deal with student problems. If they have problems they should not be here." Walking into a dormitory with his daughter's trunk, a father's first encounter with anyone at Exeter was: "Hello, I am your daughter's advisor. She is going to hate me." (She did.) Another advisor in a girl's dorm who purports to colleagues how much time and care he devotes to his duties there, is regarded by the girls as a snoop who regularly walks into rooms hoping to see someone undressed. That may not be his intention, but, as with classroom work, the common student perception speaks volumes as to the gap between what Academy officialdom regard as a good job and what actually makes students feel cared for and secure. Many students lament that the only time they see their advisor is when they get their grades (distribution being an advisor's function) or when they break the rules. It is bad parenting in any context. Twenty or thirty years ago Exeter faculty could be cold, aloof, or humorously out of touch with youth culture. With new or greatly intensified old issues of divorce, sex, alcohol, drugs and suicide, such stances are not merely affordable waste but dangerous. But the structural imperatives of an old hierarchy stymie adjustment.

The hierarchical imperative aggravates many matters. Just as individuals have achieved high administrative status without ever serving in the classroom, political pressures in the Academy community have compelled the school to grant full-faculty, hence student-advising, status to people not directly concerned with the classroom or with much knowledge of young peoples' daily lives. Gym coaches, for example, have faculty rank. To complete the surrealism, they insist on a nomenclature that refers to their intramural and interscholastic sports sessions as "courses" and the supervision of them as "teaching." Many parents shake their heads with consternation and sadness when they discover their child's primary source of academic advice is someone with no real classroom experience. To this situation one parent commented: "Exeter asks us to write 'what annoys you [and] puzzles you about Exeter' and the temptation to respond is great." Another was more blunt: "What the hell is going on in that school?"



In addition to not caring or being ignorant of key components of students' lives, some faculty simply prove not very capable with young people in a dormitory situation. Faculty generally write their advisees' parents at Christmas time. One advisor had no idea of what to say. So he required his advisees to write an essay before going home on how the fall had gone. Subsequently he lifted their essays verbatim into his letters. Of course many parents showed their children the letters, and the students who did not see them soon learned of the absurdity when they returned from vacation. Respect died all around.

An older faculty member lectured a younger colleague, who was quite popular with the students, that it was "dangerous for him to be close to the students." The official Academy line apparently holds a distance best be maintained from students to deal with them effectively. Voicing such sentiments, the elder thought largely like a company man about the rules and procedures which might not be followed to the letter in a crisis and lead to administrative headaches. The younger thought about the many problems that took on but mild ramifications because the student had a close friend who could diffuse a problem and not let it fester in cold isolation, or about the many would-be problems that never arose at all due to the bonds of friendship. A problem need not have administrative ramifications to be real, except to an administrator. An unavoidable generational gap lies beneath here. Such a gap is larger than Exeter, but greatly magnified there. The suffused assuredness of the elder better fit the needs of an IBM than a PEA.

Just as with respect to the classroom there are those who equate, or rationalize, dullness with rigor and suspect liveliness from younger colleagues; many faculty who are friendly and close with students engender suspicion regarding their ability to discipline. The collective ego about Exeter's excellence renders this view unassailable. As in any closed institution, it is politically wiser to strive not to do wrong than to do right. Many on the faculty and staff express they are troubled by Exeter's reputation as a cold place. Yet with rather aloof stuffiness, many let students sit in cold isolation and advise newcomers not to be too close or friendly. Faculty and administrators need to look at the premium they place on procedures which imply "all questions have been asked; all answers have

been given." They should analyze their tendency to reward insiders more faithful to the administration of the Academy than to serving the needs of the students. In this spirit they should lead themselves and not merely drift. And they should chuck the party-line atmosphere they hold out to newcomers. Then they might garner a clue.

"Clueless" is a word many Exeter students bandy about. It is not a word that has swept the nation's youth, *à la* "awesome" in 1982-83. It is a trifle more local. The prescience of the word for Exeter students reflects in part their obnoxious sense of themselves so on top of the world that only they see all, hence any far from their lofty perch see nothing. Beyond this high bourgeois egotism, the atmosphere of the Academy reinforces the utility of "clueless." Elsewhere a student term like "nerd" is a more common derision. At Exeter this is a bit less the case, though it may not seem so to many. Students harbor a greater respect for intelligence and hard work. "Nerds" certainly get hazed, but it is a pale version of what they would receive in a public school or in most other boarding schools. "Get a clue" is a most insulting admonition at Exeter, and it extends greatly from the atmosphere of the Academy. The worlds of the students and faculty are so vastly distinct that authority often appears to students utterly out of touch with reality—clueless.

The milieu of students is quite foreign to most faculty. Students are inner-directed, ambitious, aggressive, competitive. The faculty live in an unspontaneous, other-directed sphere that muffles all such tendencies. Students being young naturally fail to see bits of wisdom among some of their teachers, the best of whom recognize that little ought to be done to change students' views about them, as eventual understanding through self-discovery and experience will enrich and deepen the eventual lesson. Faculty hold that ideal to a fault in the classroom, forgetting the degree of instrumentality in that forum that cannot be overlooked, but they are quite different outside. There the faculty ideals of "goodness" in day-to-day student behavior translate into "conformity to the rules." Students understand or at least sense the mechanical nature of this mode of administration and chafe. The result is a greater disrespect for authority than its wiser dispensing would engender. The gap widens as student misconduct motivates advocacy of greater



stringency. If only people would look at content over form. "Respecting the student" is a watchphrase at Exeter, largely followed but outwardly in the classroom. Little or no respect or trust can be found elsewhere.

In addition to showing little trust in students as human beings, many faculty actually fear their pupils. In Exeter's post-Civil War dark ages numerous incidents of violence occurred with several faculty actually injured. This may be a deep root of the tradition of fear. But strongest is the anxiety many faculty hold about not being as intelligent as many of their students. That can be very destructive for someone at Exeter where so many are so bright. If people were more inwardly peaceful, or a trifle ambitious with respect to something beyond the school, such fears would not abound, nor would there be such a demand for an outwardly serene environment among one another.

Anxieties also abound among faculty over matters of personal privacy. The neuroses some faculty reveal as they cling to certain personal matters invite sniping from playful students. As is always the case, and certainly so with intelligent students in a 24-hour boarding school, secrets of any sort are hard to keep. When two teachers were living together, one was absurdly secretive about the affair, telling *everyone* "do not tell anyone, but...." Students keyed in beautifully. They snapped a photograph of the couple sitting at a basketball game and placed it prominently in the yearbook. One Valentine's Day students mailed two dozen long stem red roses to one teacher, signing to them the name of her homosexual lover. Chuckling, their advisor talked them into pulling the order.

Amidst such anxiety and pranks, teachers grow fearful of being open. But whatever teachers put forth that is not genuine, students will see through it. Whatever they hide, students find it. When they will not be themselves, they get little respect. And when they subsequently hide behind the rules, they get a lack of disrespect at best, and the rules get disgraced. This does the teachers no good, though they can live with it one way or another. It does the students even worse. The emotionally needy feel isolated and depressed. The mischievous accelerate one another. It is an old pattern, one that cannot be fully eliminated. But the litmus test of a school's collective spiritual health lies in the degree to which it minimizes it. Exeter fails.

The wide gap of sensibility and fear between faculty and students has many sad manifestations and consequences. Every Friday morning the faculty meet. The meetings have a cabal-like image in student's minds. In fact little is said that students could not hear. Certainly there would be problems with making such meetings open, but the Academy aggravates the negative mystique by posting janitors to guard the door and generally making such a fuss about *the* meeting. In the spring of 1985 one student attempted suicide, and the tragic saga was relayed to the faculty. It came out that drinking had preceded the attempt. One faculty member then inquired with dead seriousness: "After the student gets out of the hospital, will we then process the drinking violation?"!

Such a fundamental lack of human respect is not widespread, but less alarming manifestations are. The students, for example, called for class evaluations at mid semester in addition to those at the end. Half-heartedly, the faculty acquiesced and subsequently ignored the matter. Some students call for longer library hours, and faculty opposed the idea largely out of fear of a greater amount of fooling around that might result from such increased latitude. The Academy also has a three-week interim session of non-athletic courses taken between fall and winter sports seasons. The faculty could not come up with many courses (a commentary in itself), and some ideas drew no student interest. The result was a number crunch. To relieve future squeezes some suggested the session simply be made optional. This suggestion prompted many to voice fears as to what evils would come with students having so much free time. The attitude tends to be self-fulfilling. And many now want to chuck the innovation and go back to required athletics.

In one girl's dormitory a student was playing music with many gathered around. Fully aware of the double entendre, someone yelled out to her the old jazz admonition "don't give it away." Everyone loved it. One student immediately suggested that be the dormitory motto for the year. Everyone loved that even more, save various would-be boyfriends gathered about at that moment. The dormitory's supervisor was horrified and forbade it, throwing cold water on everything. Another time a faculty member walked into a dormitory TV room and interrupted two students making out.



He coughed and, without moving his lower jaw, pronounced to the young man: "I did not violate the sanctity of a woman's undergarments until my sophomore year in college." Naturally the young man told the teacher how sorry he was. In novels and movies sit classic old Victorian prudes. It is mind-boggling actually to witness such self-righteousness in person. Oscar Wilde would have had a field day. Such faculty take themselves *so* earnestly, and to the students they are a joke.

In the fall of 1983 network television broadcast *The Day After*, the special about what might happen in a nuclear holocaust. Some faculty wanted to allow students to see it. This brought forth a long faculty debate. Some faculty had previewed an abridged version of the program. A few were uncomfortable. One in particular went completely to pieces, crying uncontrollably. Their negative responses provided a basis for extreme resistance to allowing the students to see the program. The students' emotional stability was at hand, many solemnly thought. The students watched it. As throughout the country the reaction was non-existent. The psychological hotline the U.S. government had set up for troubled people received a grand total of five calls over the next two days. One Exeter dorm of forty-five boys was terribly depressed. Instead of ordering out the evening's usual eight or nine pizzas they ordered but seven. The next day the Academy required a day of classes be devoted to discussing any matters on students' minds in the wake of the show. The concerns were therapeutic, not with the nuclear issue itself. The students were indeed therapeutically concerned—about some of their teachers. Students who had earnestly made themselves available to those in need of help took heavy abuse (can we bring our other problems to you, please?). The administration and faculty further revealed themselves to students to be unconcerned about important matters while bent out of shape over trivialities. As one student put it: "Clueless!"

Since the earliest days of the school, Exeter students have gone to classes six days a week. Harrow, Eaton, and other British public schools always did this, and Exeter simply followed the pattern. Today the expressed justification further holds that the students gain a work habit they will carry with them for life, keeping them a step ahead of all others. Some students internalize the experience the other way and vow never again to work on a

Saturday as long as they live. Another important reason many faculty hold to the six-day week involves apprehensions over what students will do with more extended free time. This "idle-hands-are-the-Devil's-workshop" outlook impinges on education. With an unchanging schedule, eleventh, twelfth, and post-graduate students must slog through the daily assignment, fifty-minute class routine, just like ninth-graders. Significantly longer assignments targeted at the emotional and intellectual range of seventeen- to nineteen-year-olds cannot be employed. Too much dangerous free time would be budgeted into student schedules. This unduly restricts the potential quality of the advanced-level teaching at Exeter, just as does the resistance to final examinations. It certainly does not prepare students for a university situation where daily assignments are rare. Indeed an all too common post-Exeter scenario involves a student moving to a markedly freer academic and social environment and going absolutely wild for the first year. Promising careers fall into danger. Students brains ought be continually stretched, but their emotional rubber bands need not. Some Exeter faculty cannot get these two straight.

An old-fashioned Christian sense holds adolescents ought to go through rough times to harden them for further travail in life. Of different philosophy, some modern writers, such as Peter Cookson and Caroline Hodges Persell in *Preparing for Power*, offer the thesis that children destined for wealth and power need to feel they have suffered as adolescents to expunge guilt that may later grow in their lofty perches and threaten bourgeois solidity. Their argument is that schools like Exeter serve this end well. Accepting either the modern or the Christian view (and they are remarkably similar), the nature of the difficulty can vary. The academic rigors at Exeter could be toughened. They are rough now, but holes exist, and students know them. Academic stringency could generate the toughness such outlooks prescribe. But it would not emotionally pervert or destroy so many along the way. E. M. Forester reflected on the English system churning out young men with "underdeveloped hearts." Now the hearts and spirits of young men and women are not merely underdeveloped, they are often damaged.



Exeter's six-day week and generally cold ambience buttress a troublesome behavior pattern among students. They work hard all week. On Saturday they let themselves go crazy. Sunday they sleep in and recover. Monday they start over. It is a depressing cycle, one that grinds down the spirit of many. Other prep school students suffer similarly, but no other combines Exeter's small-town isolation and a six-day work week.

An Ivy League Admissions officer commented that Exeter students often come across tired and depressed in interviews. So many look like they could use a good nap all the time. Granted the academic regimen is tough, but so are other institutions' where the same impression is not incessantly conveyed. The impinging closed system of the school fosters this, and it makes little sense to many with a window on the Academy. Admissions officers of many universities sadly shake their heads about the Academy not allowing seniors to leave campus to attend on-campus orientation sessions. Such justifications as "The Harkness seminars cannot be disturbed"; and "The students will abuse the privilege if allowed to go," yield a bedrock of Exeter's self-destructive conservatism, aggressively passive with traditions, passively aggressive with students. Such views do not sit well with the no-nonsense attitude of college admissions people. These days the quality students from public schools can get the nod over preppies judged their equals. Amidst this shift, Exeter does not seem to have adjusted. Faculty indeed respond either by lamenting declining status or by being smug and cynical with students about their college admissions. A few sincerely expressed words to students can counter the neurotic level to which students take their upper-Ivy-League preoccupations. The cynicism which some students encounter, however, has no such positive impact. It reveals instead a bit of jealousy of students about to pursue another's shelved ambitions. It clearly shows a lack of empathy. And it widens the coldness of Exeter where student and faculty worlds sit in isolation, creating no warmth for one another.

The coldness of Exeter explains why so many students use free time so depressively. They drink, as students do everywhere. But many drink not to feel good but to feel nothing. The amount of alcohol consumption is frightening, and the destructive see-how-much pattern reveals either an unhealthy translation of excessive competitiveness from the academic to the

social or a desire to escape something, something bigger than Exeter, but something of which Exeter is a part while it should and could be the opposite. At public schools such boozers are not always the college bound. There some of the upwardly mobile have comparative purpose. Exeter students, generally always feeling atop the world, have few such inner gyroscopes. They started out high and have nowhere to which to strive. The ego of the Academy contributes to this suffusion. To serve students better a little collective ego deflation would be in order, particularly since it would better correspond with reality.

The depressive pattern of student drinking is ever more apparent and dangerous with drugs. Exeter students do lots of drugs. Cookson and Persell hold that drug use is great at all the major prep schools and is indicative of a depressive strain running through all of them. Clearly whenever one combines young people and money these days drugs appear. In the spring of 1984 Choate-Rosemary Hall School, known now among New England preppies as Coke-Nosebury Hall, brought this problem to the public eye when several students were caught in a scam to smuggle cocaine back from Colombia over spring break. But Choate students are not unique; they just happened to get caught. At Deerfield a prospective student and his parents were touring the campus. When asked if there was a drug problem on campus, the student guide inadvertently blurted; "There's no problem, you can get anything you want."

At prep school campuses there is always marijuana, hashish, quaaludes, valium, speed, barbiturates, cocaine, acid, PCP, and ecstasy. Liquor use is easy to spot; drugs less so. Acid is as easy to hide as notebook paper. The use of small amounts of marijuana, hashish, speed, cocaine, or even acid is virtually undetectable to the unaware. The number of students who go stoned, or sometimes tripping, to Exeter's allegedly intense seminars is quite high. With eleventh- and twelfth graders the likely odds are at least one student is high in every class, yet more so for classes that meet late in the day after sports or on Friday morning after faculty meetings, the time in the day when students figure they will least likely get caught smoking or having sex in their rooms. Plenty of drugs flow in and out of Exeter. Andover, Exeter, and other Boston-area students know about the liquor stores in



Chinatown and cafes like Acapulco's where one does not get carded and about the various trees in Boston Common (the coke tree, the pot tree, the heroin tree(!)) where one simply camps out for a few minutes and a dealer appears as fast as a clerk in a Harvard Square clothing shop. In the woods at one end of the Exeter campus is "the crater," visited nearly as much as the library or, some nights, the dining hall, where folks drink, have sex, and get stoned. One faculty member had a regular affair with several students there one spring.

Marijuana is everywhere at Exeter, but other dangerous drugs abound as well. Schools have reputations among preppies on the basis of what drug dominates the scene. Andover is a coke school, having eclipsed Choate whose administration has imposed Draconian measures since the scandal. Far out in the space of New Hampshire, Exeter is known for acid. In May, 1985 one boy sold 900 (that is not a misprint) tabs of acid. Some late spring drug sales go into summer stashes, but that still averages nearly one hit per student, and from only one dealer. With approximately a quarter to a third of the students never touching drugs, and half occasionally trying pot or smoking only on weekends, there remains a core group of fifty to one hundred who consume a "humongous" amount of drugs.

The drug culture may have begun with the urban poor. But it jumped from there to the upper bourgeoisie. They had the money of course. The emptiness of life without material want also prompted an envy of those markedly different who seemed to suffer more materially hence less spiritually. This bourgeois sensing and miming the apparent grace of poverty is an old phenomenon. Modern youth have revealed it in regard to their three big concerns—sex, drugs, and music. When the young's musical tastes first turned to the urban ghetto it posed no real problem. When the sexual revolution hopped from Harlem to Scarsdale it primarily caused emotional troubles. But when drugs became part of the pursuit of "the cool" genuine catastrophe loomed. Exeter students are a part of this development. Their musical tastes ebb and flow. The sexual revolution will likely never reverse unless AIDS and herpes get even more out of hand, and even then it will likely hit prep schoolers last. But drugs, once present, assume a dynamic of their own.

The bourgeois world that had been largely self-contained has opened its doors and bought off some of the best of the poorer classes. But it has also opened wide certain destructive avenues that began among those classes, formerly utterly beyond the pale. However, the culture of the poor would have invaded the bourgeoisie even if they had not opened their institutional doors a bit. If only a small number of rich youth succumb the trouble can be written off in social-Darwinist terms, a youth gone bad like a poorly run business gone broke. But because morally such capitalist strictures cannot apply to minors and, more importantly, when an unhealthy quantity are drawn in, calls come for something to be done. Pressure falls on schools and other institutions of youth to clamp down, accelerating the very dynamics of distrust and pressure which contributed to the whole destructive cycle among rich youth in the first place.

A few dormitories at Exeter are known as the centers of party and drug activity. One student who lived in a party dorm grew dependent on drugs. This pattern has continued since his graduation and now apparently poses a permanent threat to his well-being. His parents (unsuccessfully) sued the Academy for a tidy sum. The late Eddie Perry lived in that same party dorm. Indeed the *Life Magazine* article and other pieces on Eddie and his dorm preceded the lawsuit. Perhaps it put the pieces together for the parents, or perhaps cynically it gave them a legal lever. Perry smoked all the time and dealt a little, including some PCP. But he was mild compared to others in his dorm. Several years ago one dorm used to maintain a keg of beer and had regular happy hours on their top floor. Drugs, alcohol, and sex are everywhere. Four people founded an exclusive club whose initiation rite was sex on a Harkness table. Such hedonism is part of the demise of some rich youth. The late David Kennedy was one of the more famous along these lines with his many escapades in sexual perversion and drug use. While the saga of sex, alcohol, and drug use at Exeter and elsewhere is true, further revealing is the students' folklorish, fascinated, retelling of such stories. In the folklore of the school, the four-person sex group became a large club. Such lore focusing on a Harkness table reveals much about the respect students hold for the institution, and in other ways for themselves. If the school breeds such frustration and disdain, prompts or at least extends self-



destructive forms of protest among some, and finds so many not involved but still relishing stories of such decadence, it ought look carefully at its corporate culture. But most faculty and administration are not terribly aware of the problems, much less able fully to grasp or deal with them in any way other than to clamp down more tightly with the rules and thus worsen the school's depressing aura.

Students indeed give vision to faculty they do not and more than likely cannot have. Those faculty who know the whereabouts of drugs, for example, cannot easily enter a room and search without permission from higher-ups. With advice from lawyers the school is very stringent about any such entry. The dictum is you have to know what you are looking for and where you expect to find it. Busting is usually accidental. Those that get caught are usually stupid, careless, or unlucky.

Those who get caught go before a faculty committee that metes out punishments. The Committee holds a Star-Chamber image in students' minds. In fact it operates very much in the dark. Most on the committee try their best, though several seem to enjoy the Lilliputian power they wield. A student's general record often proves critical in the Committee's deliberations. Because of the gaps between the administrative modes that generate the official record and the actual day-to-day lives of students, the pivotal role of official records causes problems. At times students outwardly good, but of contrasting reputation with peers, get off lightly. Others of higher peer standing do not. The result is a sense of capriciousness and unfairness in student minds.

Some of the Committee's operational norms do have odd implications. If a student drinks while loudly partying, he or she, more often he, will likely be thrown out. Quiet drinking, alone in a room with the light off earns probation. Apparently proto-sorority- or fraternity-ism is worse than proto-alcoholism. There have also been times when those in charge of discipline use students as examples to others. Three boys were thrown out for drinking, all had clean records, and one had only stumbled into the party a few minutes before the bust. But they lived in a dorm where partying was a problem, so they were booted as a warning to others. All this fosters in students a sense that "the system" is nothing in which to put any faith. Rules,

per se, emerge as but a haphazard guide to a capricious authority. This generates a cynical sense of self-reliance that says right and wrong are not as important as cultivating a good image and not getting caught.

Drugs themselves accentuate this mentality. With them students easily suffuse with cynicism that which requires work. Drug users desire to be interesting to themselves without working for it. Young people, raised with an ever-increasing cosmopolitan awareness of at least the superficialities of the forces of the world around them, need to accommodate all that bombards them. The unnecessary pace of this unduly taxes many people's fragile emotional makeup. Banal, pseudo-aware ideologies work for some. They at least require some work, though spiritually they work much like a drug. Drug use itself requires no work and lends a great feeling of false comprehension.

Exeter imparts to itself that it is the best. With this comes a sense that an Exeter student should be intelligent, knowledgeable, sophisticated, and wordly. For some the pressure to be all those things extends a strong work ethic that can last a lifetime. Others, for whatever reason, shortcircuit the process and attempt to have the mere appearance of such traits. Drugs provide the means here as well as relief from the anxiety that inevitably arises. Yet others, bright enough to succeed at Exeter without much effort, feel incredibly bored. They turn to drugs, saying in effect: if Exeter is no challenge what could be? Still others are so wrapped up in the competition of the family and peer environment that they turn to sex and drugs as one more thing at which to triumph over peers. In all cases, the user suffuses him or herself in a holding pattern, lacking the will to make moral sense of experience, turning instead to blind, cynical generalities. Fantasy can never become commitment, nor can feeling yield conscience or envy mastery. It is a problem far greater than Exeter. But the school's unjustifiable smugness, its sense of itself as the absolute best, provides unnecessary acceleration to the whole mess.

When Bruno Bettelheim visited Exeter, to the question of drug abuse among the young he advised: people know drugs are bad. If they continue to use them despite that knowledge, there must be a reason that overpowers that knowledge. Thus continually telling them "drugs are bad; don't take



them" does not get to the heart of the problem. Attention must focus on that other reason.

Most everyone at Exeter wants to do something about drugs. As with meetings about curriculum and with the evening discussion with Bruno Bettelheim, however, few faculty seem to care enough to attend any extra meetings that have been held to grapple with the matter. A few simply advise to "throw the bums out." (They would be expelling much of the school each year.) Such measures as compulsory searches and blood and urine tests as Choate now employs would be hideous and destroy any conducive educational atmosphere. Short of such extremism, Exeter, like all, seems unsure of itself in focusing on Bettelheim's "other reason." Excessively rigid mathematical approaches to such a complex, human problem will likely prompt people simply to focus on yet another system to hold in disrespect and to try to circumvent. To the degree Exeter's institutional ego contributes to the situation they could begin to diffuse it. But that is something some at Exeter have difficulty recognizing or facing. Other more powerful elements of the institution intrude very quickly.

One teacher, for example, brought up the issue of drug abuse as a focal point for a class discussion of youth culture in modern America. To bring the point home, the teacher noted how this was obviously something taking place on the Exeter campus right then. Subsequently, the teacher found himself chastised by an elder, who was observing that day, for "such a gaff." The elder was shocked, and there was an outside guest in the room as well. So the elder thought about "dirty laundry." Yet the point was useful. Additionally, if a female brought up an experience of sexual attack in the context of a discussion on modern violence, all hell would break loose on anyone who would assert such matters were unacceptable in an Exeter seminar. But aside from the politically correct ground of middle-class women's issues, Exeter seminars apparently train for reality more than with it.

The Academy brings speakers to confer with students on the subject of drugs. Some of the speakers have been good, others terrible. One embarrassingly feeble speaker was brought in because she was a friend of a staff member involved with the Women's Committee. The speaker's

ineptness left the students further alienated from the sincere wishes of some of their elders both to improve the status of women and to show they care about drug abuse. Like racism, drugs are an issue less easy to tackle than women's rights, and the tougher finds itself easily sacrificed at any intersection. Like a drug, the pursuit of the easier issue creates a facade of action and a veneer of care.

In 1985 the Academy established a core group of faculty, staff, and students to deal with the issue of drugs. The group has deepened some people's concerns for the issue. But many of the participants are the already-converted. Further, when one student came to the group to discuss her problem with marijuana, she found her supposedly confidential confessions being held against her when she later had to answer to charges before the disciplinary committee, staffed by some of the same people in the drug group. She was expelled, and her trusting communications with the drug group were a pivotal factor.

A major organization concerned with drug-abuse—Freedom from Chemical Dependency—has sent representatives to Exeter several times. They now advise they can do little more, holding the Academy should go it alone and activate their own internal community to grapple effectively with the problem. It is at this point the Academy stumbles. Its age and ego will not permit the honesty necessary to make even a dent in this most pivotal issue. Internal problems are too compelling to prevent energy from being spent on easier matters. Deep troubles go to the back burner where they continue to heat. Internal political considerations subsume everything, including that which best serves the needs of students.

Beyond the obvious tragedy of students who slip into the quagmire of alcohol, drugs or even suicide, a more subtle tragedy involves those otherwise healthy who leave the Academy with a decided jading. Exeter at least deepens the cynicism of students already predisposed; more directly it breeds cynics. Most ninth-graders are bright and innocent upon arrival. They often leave quite hardened. "Four years is too much" is an oft' repeated axiom. Such moulding yields a striking predominance of graduates in the money professions over the helping ones. The graduates tend to be independent and emotionally tough, but less often sensitive or caring. Much silliness with



the seminar system leaves learning as much a game of getting around assignments and telling teachers what they want to hear as a genuine quest for knowledge. The cluelessness of many faculty outside the classroom renders authority to be manipulated more than respected. In the classroom and in general dealings with authority, many come to see image as pivotal. Deepening cynical currents and damming out alternatives, Exeter leaves many students with fondest memories involving breaking rules and tweaking the nose of pompous authority. At best modern alumni see the institution as something that honed study habits and put one a step ahead of peers for maybe the first or second year of college. Warm memories are of fellow students or of a few teachers. If one were to ask recent graduates if they felt the institution of the Academy genuinely cared for them, many or most would laugh or groan.

"I've had about thirty teachers," commented one senior, "and I feel I could trust maybe four or five of them." Exeter faculty implore students to trust them. Such trust is necessary if proper parenting in the dormitories is to begin to break the cycle of unhappiness and futility that prompts suicide, drug and alcohol use, and other depressive behavior. But mere exhortation will not work. Trust must be earned. Calling for it renders it yet more remote. The thickets of pomposity and fears of faculty *vis à vis* students, political preoccupations which permit masks of pseudo concern, and general apathy so abound among faculty that a genuine change in atmosphere is virtually impossible. Faculty seem to be willing to make minor adjustments—exhort and preach for better behavior, take part in discussions—but little requiring any extended commitment. As long as they remain basically content and lazy, they will never begin to grasp the depth of what needs to be done, and a cold, depressing aura will remain and plague all.





## Chapter VI

### The Past and the Future

The collective ego of the institution is utterly overweening. It distorts so much on the campus, from the actual working of seminar system, to the roots of the school's excellent reputation, to the operation of day-to-day administration. It further shields the Academy from challenge and criticism. Students are basically not listened to, save in peripheral issues. This leaves them isolated, a position from which some thrive irrespective of the school, their success thus being a mistaken source of Academy pride. It leaves many others hurt, most but a bit, some profoundly. Wise parental authority knows how to listen patiently to children even when they are not making sense, even more how to nurture thoughts when the means of expression are not terribly facile. Injury is inflicted when high-handed contempt is shown and achieves rhetorical success due merely to intimidation and greater verbal fluency. A young person's spirit is bruised and, with repetitions, does not rebound but merely compensates with a torpor manifesting in a nihilistic, cynical outlook and guarded, manipulative behavior. With the gamesmanship of the seminar system and the cold aura of the Academy more generally, it is more than accidental that Exeter produces legions of corporate lawyers, stock traders and investment bankers but few teachers, social workers or health practitioners (weak physical science teaching is a particular aggravation here). It is a problem among modern youth far greater than Exeter, but one which the institution ought be countering. Instead it is lazily and unwittingly part of the problem.

When the late Eddie Perry graduated from Exeter he wrote next to his yearbook photo: "Good-bye to Exeter....We do not part on good terms....Learn to deal with reality, as will I." While understanding his own need for growth, Perry grasped Exeter's utterly self-absorbed self-overrating and resulting unreality. Like others on the social and economic margins, Eddie had the familiarity with the struggle for survival to sense the frivolities in those for whom survival was never an issue, as well as to express his contempt all too bluntly. This is the essential appeal, as well as the amusement, "marginals" bent on survival hold for those fortunate to be able to grapple only with freedom. The tragic counterpoint in Eddie Perry's case, and many others', is that they seldom possess the social and psychological means to experience hypocrisy outside their environs without feeling too much of it in themselves and having it render them confused, angry, or in Eddie's case virtually schizophrenic. Had he lived, Eddie may have grown beyond many of the confusions he took to his grave. Exeter reveals few such prospects for genuine growth.

While damaging students, this constrictive, unchanging specter holds for faculty too. Newcomers must beware. In discourse the nature of the relationships of the individuals involved rather than the ethical character of the ideas expressed is the standard for judgments of action. Faculties at most schools, colleges, and universities have distinct if unwritten pecking orders. Exeter loves to think of itself as having little outward hierarchy, but inwardly it is incredibly severe. This open-yet-closed structure promotes political shrewdness as much as educational quality as the means of success. A dull mediocrity who plays a good political game rises far over one excellent and outspoken. Intelligence is certainly necessary, but intellect can be dangerous. Temperament is a vastly more significant survival tool than will. Politically one must exude a sense of being extremely grateful to the institution for being allowed to teach there. Such piety yields promotions more than does actual good work.

The extreme contrast between the outward and inward expectations the Academy holds for its people goes to the heart of its corporate culture and explains its extraordinary conservatism. All changes tend to be subverted or rendered non threatening. The curriculum changes of 1985, for



example, were minimal in scope, yet they serve as a source of illusory pride as to how the school is always open and adjusting. The Harkness seminar plan has grown into a caricature of its original self. At inception it cleared out many old cobwebs in the place. Now it is a cobweb. Its pseudo standards compel outer obedience more than excellence. A half century ago when the Harkness system was first instituted, the school had to hire a sizable block of new teachers. By sheer quantity this group brought a freshness to the school, as do a sizable block of newcomers to any institution. Their numbers varied the usual dynamic of newcomers arriving in small numbers and conforming to the culture of the vast majority. Their mass arrival was indeed more responsible for refreshing the Academy than were the tables on which they came to teach. And now the seminar system is part of the Academy culture. Faculty continually hire, train and promote in their own image. Fecklessness begets fecklessness.

Coeducation has further given the school a convenient squeaky wheel onto which it can pour lubricants of social justice while largely ignoring fundamentally tougher matters like race. Some faculty earnestly reflect on how terribly significant were the changes of the Harkness system and coeducation. But in a broader sense the two marked significant changes for but a short time. The essential culture of the school did not change. The development of its increasingly cold, phthisic nature is the truly significant change in the Academy in recent decades.

Critics at Exeter find themselves reduced *ad hominem*. Conflicts, as in any small town, become highly personal. The inherent content of conflicting ideas is secondary to the people raising them. As tranquility is the ideal, anything that disturbs, no matter its content or sincerity, is suspect. Membership is evaluative not merely descriptive; criticism is descriptive in impact not evaluative. This discombobulation of thought is ultimately perverse. It fosters one dimensionality and subverts education. The faculty turnover rate is now alarmingly high. Forty-five percent of the faculty have been there three years or less. That figure will likely rise. In 1989 a fifth of the faculty left. Students are faced with teachers who have little or no tie to the institution (or a rapidly growing negative one). Or they encounter veteran teachers who have risen through political labyrinths which have little

to do with education, labyrinths which students cannot understand and should not have to. Politically inclined students seek to learn them and become quite cynical as a result. Generally students sense only quality and character, and the quality and character are often mediocre. They logically respond by playing games as much as actually learning.

When Robert Anson published his book on Eddie Perry many at Exeter were upset with the revelations of racism, drug use and out-of-touch faculty. And the upset was as much over the "dirty-laundry" revelation as over the facts themselves. Some specific changes resulted, largely entailing more bureaucratic work foisted onto instructors from non-teaching administrators to deal with human problems which defy and are ultimately aggravated by bureaucratic engineering. A Marine drill instructor of a gym teacher was placed in Eddie's old dorm, one of the dorms where drugs and drinking had become a problem. Deans and faculty patrol dormitory halls, as many conscientious faculty had in the past. Generally the Academy clamped down on rules but did not open up on humanity.

One scholarship student from New York from a similar background as Eddie Perry's was told by several teachers not to read Anson's book until he'd been away from Exeter for a few weeks. Many at Exeter saw Anson's book negatively. Any criticism gets blown out of proportion at the Academy. Any implication that Exeter is less than the best runs into trouble. Intellectually this umbrage could spark profitable debate. But in a crunch Exeter's way is anti-intellectual. Their care is for outer tranquility. One result: teachers telling a student not to read a book.

Anson's thesis—that schools like Exeter which take bright students from urban ghettos risk inducing in them a type of sociological schizophrenia—was reduced among Exeter insiders into a conspiratorial mode, in this case against blacks. Such instinctively *ad hominem* casting of any challenge into such an absurd and simply incorrect light typifies an institution which nervously clings to its sense of perfection. Such casting permits, demands facile denials.

The roots of this pattern of one dimensionality go deep into Exeter's history. It has always been a small town and continues to be one while many other communities change. Indeed it seems to curl ever inward as the region



has grown more suburban. Many in the community comment on the other-worldly sense one has entering the campus and the reduced tension upon leaving. The faculty's deep fear of being less intelligent than their students prompts collective emphases on community over intellect which in turn allows the institution comfortably to freeze out many disquieting and confident from its ranks.

It is a tall order to change a culture whose roots lie so deep. Historically, the community was always tiny and demanded calm of its inhabitants. Indeed the town of Exeter began back in 1641 as a Puritan village. Echoes of this conformity imperative were present through the early decades long after Puritanism itself decayed. During the Revolution that established community conservatism did not clash with anything when the British were the outsiders. Indeed the cause of the Revolution in this context involved less the equality of man than the maintenance of the old order against British intrusion, as well as the opportunity to seize lands of those sympathetic to the "wrong side." The ideals of Jefferson and friends probably trickled down to the common folks at Exeter only insofar as they conformed to existing community needs. The ideals raised no hackles, so a particular strain of them won superficial applause.

The same pattern of subversion occurred when an idealist like New England educator John Phillips established schools at Andover and Exeter. He sought to counter the decaying morality he found in northern New England where in the 1780's petty power concerns increasingly revealed themselves to be displacing the idealism of the Revolution. Phillips hoped young men at his schools would be immersed in ideals and not lose the moral anchor that was the ideology of the new Republic. He cared little for any direct impact of his pedagogical ideals on the communities in which he placed his schools, or vice versa. He would not have objected to such interaction, but if that had been a prime motive he would have located his schools in Boston or some other sizable city. He idealized a retreat, an a religious monasticism, where ideals could be imbibed free of disrupting urban hubbub. What he did not foresee was the way in a generation or two the community of the small New Hampshire town in which students and faculty would live, and quite closely in the early years of town rooming

houses instead of dormitories, would begin subtly to supersede any abstract ideals whose operation might clash with communal tranquility. With such subversion from early times, Exeter has sustained this pattern, with the new combining with the old, never fundamentally altering it. Now the "old" is the community of the Academy itself. In this spirit, all in the community are outwardly free to contribute while that community is a most closed body.

Phillips wrote that "knowledge without goodness is dangerous." And everyone at Exeter mouths this phrase in a myriad of contexts. Phillips' ideal is most commonly summoned in reference to the students and the duty of the Academy faculty to them. The assumption is that students will inexorably gain knowledge by virtue of their general excellence. A chief mission of the school, then, is to instill in students a goodness lest their knowledge have no anchor. Certainly this is valid. It does not always work, however. The virulent cynicism of students cannot be so easily expunged. But in the context of Phillips' dictum lies a deeper reason why the school has trouble instilling goodness in students. For Phillips' statement was *not* "knowledge without goodness is dangerous." More fully his sentence reads: "While goodness without knowledge is weak and feeble, knowledge without goodness is dangerous." Phillips clearly saw the pitfall of knowledge without goodness the greater danger of his own time and gave greater emphasis to it. But, very much a creature of that Enlightenment that gave civilization balanced concepts and structures of thought and government which still exist, Phillips never lost his sense of ideological equipoise. Thus while holding his fears about knowledge without goodness on high Phillips knew, above all, that this or any ideal could never stand alone, lest it pervert itself without the refreshing influence of counterweight. All ideals, to him and his wise generation, had to be cast in a balanced context to have any lasting meaning and vitality. Half quoting, Exeter has lost touch with its heritage of eighteenth-century balance. Many students and faculty do not even know the first half of their founder's dictum. They superficially follow the ideal of the danger of knowledge without goodness but with no sense of counterpitfall, and there they have fallen.

Indeed the community reveals Phillips' and the Enlightenment's wisdom. What would he think if he heard the Moonie-like reference to



"Uncle Phil?" Phillips was an *eighteenth*-century republican. The closed, unchanging Academy community risks great enfeeblement. Its strength is not genuine as it lies largely in its ability to forestall alteration. It is merely aggressively passive and timid, not dynamic. Its reputation rests on outside forces, not on anything internal. Seeing this, were Phillips writing in the late twentieth century, to his faculty he might cast his balanced wisdom in reverse. And if he was today an Exeter student he would phrase it thus: Accepting knowledge without goodness is dangerous, goodness without knowledge is clueless.

Most established institutions fall into patterns that render them mere caricatures of their original selves. Exeter has lapsed into this to a colossal degree, more than established corporations which have to contend with their profit line, more than the best universities whose faculties must continue to win the plaudits of colleagues from other institutions, more than even small schools that do not promote scholarship but do know that they must listen to and learn from others. Exeter feels it needs only itself and satisfies itself by nurturing and promoting loyalty and driving out criticism. Competence remains a priority, but loyalty has eclipsed excellence, hence mediocrity grows.

As long as good students keep coming Exeter will encounter no major crisis, but it will slide. External factors constituted the principal causes of the Academy's earlier preeminent status. So too will they determine its future. Another major financial crunch could damage it severely. Since the Trustees blew a third of the endowment in the stock market in the mid-1970's, Exeter has been "in the pack" with respect to financial reserves among secondary schools and behind a few. Exeter's decline from "the best" to "one of several equally strong" paths to Harvard, Yale ... has also placed it amidst the best, in no clear way above all others. Its middle-range standing in regard to salaries and benefits has had the same levelling impact. The financial and external forces which made Exeter preeminent no longer operate. The failure to accept this yields no compensating "Avis" mentality. Instead grows an anxiety driven egotism. Before there may have been something ennobling tying oneself to an acknowledged institution whose life cycles were longer than



human scale. But such ties are unhealthy amidst financial and social implosion.

If the institution would but get hold of its *sui generis* nature it might forestall decline. It needs to remove its mask, its overwhelming ego about such matters as its seminars and understand it is one of a number of excellent schools from all of whom it can learn a great deal. It needs to buck up weak departments, like the critical physical sciences, whose limits the collective ego of the school shields, and awaken all out of their torporous methodological quagmire. It needs to tolerate and genuinely promote dissent, listen to outsiders, and stop promoting faculty and staff, particularly non-teachers, by the simple and dubious virtue of hierarchical loyalty. It needs to let go of political hobbyhorses like old-fashioned feminism, whose continuous riding serves no one but a few insiders, and begin to consider the human (not merely the bureaucratic) dimensions of issues involving minorities. Above all it needs to take careful note of the destructive habits, both the obvious and the subtle, that grow among students and grapple with that icy environment for which it is all too well known.

The town of Exeter's original inhabitants would applaud such a hard shake to any institution. Any such scouring would risk much, but it would make the school more real. It would reveal faults. But the ability to live with faults renders one more humorous, open, warm, and accepting of the frailty of others. If Exeter could achieve such a different tone it would better serve those who matter most--its students. And it would succeed because and not merely in spite of itself.



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